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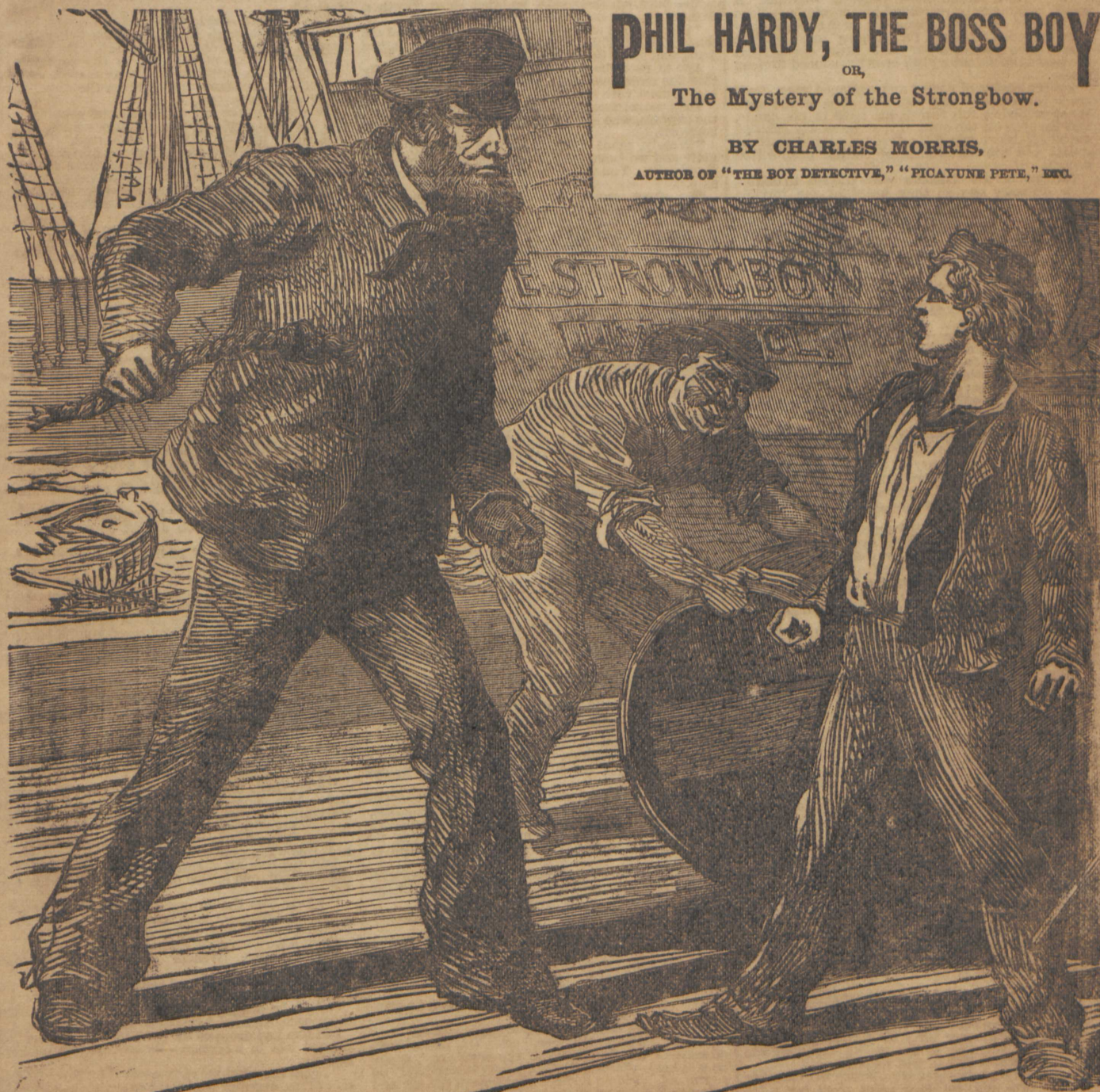
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PHIL HARDY, THE BOSS BOY OR, The Mystery of the Strongbow.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,
AUTHOR OF "THE BOY DETECTIVE," "PICAYUNE PETE," ETC.



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Phil Hardy, THE BOSS BOY;

OR,
The Mystery of the Strongbow.

BY CHARLES MORRIS.
AUTHOR OF "WILL SOMERS," "NOBODY'S BOY," ETC.

CHAPTER I. GIANTS AND DWARFS.

A GROUP of boys was seated on the end of a pier that jutted out into the East river, the swift tide-water swirling round the wharf-pieces beneath them, while to the right and left rose a wilderness of masts and the hull of great ships throbbed and chafed against the nearer wharves, as if eager for flight.

Back of them ran the swarthy boundary-line of the great city, with its endless procession of laden drays and wagons, and its roar of multitudinous wheels. Beyond the broad river appeared the walls and spires of Brooklyn. Everywhere the habitations and the works of man. Nothing of pure nature save the wrinkled stream and the blue sky.

Yet the boys were far away in spirit from that stirring scene—all save one, whose uplifted nose betrayed a deep stratum of contempt for his preoccupied companions.

They were a ragged set of youthful vagrants. A whole coat, or an unventilated hat, would have been voted there as simply ridiculous; such shoes as they wore left open windows for peeping toes; while it would have puzzled a Darwin to figure out in what far past their skins had last been introduced to clean water.

Yet the genius of poetry and romance may dwell under the mask of rags and dirt. One of the boys lay stretched at full length, his head in his hands, and his eyes on the open sky, as he slowly drew out a long-drawn tale of the deeds of some monstrous giants and the shrewdness of certain keen-witted dwarfs.

The eyes of the listeners were dilated to double their ordinary size as they heard of the terrible slaughter of the giants by the bloodthirsty dwarfs; while their hands were angrily clenched when the giants occasionally ate a half-dozen or so of their minute antagonists as a relish for supper.

And when a lady fair, with golden hair, was carried off bodily, and locked up in the private dungeon of one of these freebooters, the innate chivalry of the lads cropped out alarmingly. If they had only been present they would have shown old Blood and Bones a thing or two.

"I bet he wouldn't carried her fur!" said one, with flashing eyes and a particularly grimy face. "If I'd only had nimble Jack's cloak, that nobody couldn't see anybody in when somebody had it on; and his shoes of swiftness; and his—"

"Yes, if you'd only had the jiant under your foot, like a hoptoad, I s'pose you'd smashed him," interrupted the contemptuous youth. "It's enough to make a boss sick, all this stuff 'bout jiantes. Jist as there was any sich critters."

"So there is, too, plenty of them, if a feller only went to furrin places where they live.—Or there was in old times, anyhow, if there ain't now."

And the narrator looked half angrily at his critical auditor.

The latter—a small, stunted figure, that sat doubled up on the wharf-log, his keen eyes glittering like diamonds in his round, matter-of-fact face—gave a sniff of contempt as he answered:

"It's all very well fur you, Joe Dot, to lay there and spin off sich stuff by the yard, fur these chaps to swallow. But I aint none of that sort. What I see I b'lieve, and that's all."

"Yes, you're a smart rooster, you are," ejaculated the grimy boy. "I bet there is jiantes; and I bet I kin lick the boy as says there aint."

"That's me, I s'pose," was the unconcerned answer of the other.

"Jist as you like," cried the challenger, springing to his feet, and soaring, as it were, out of his profusion of coat.

"And who's to hold this raglan while you're gettin' curried?" asked the undisturbed youth, indicating the coat which his foe had dropped.

"Jist you keep your dirty feet and hands off it; that's all."

"You're sort of spillin' fur a fight, aint you, Dirty Dick?" disdainfully asked the other lad, as he rose and deliberately wiped his feet on the precious coat.

Dirty Dick gave a short howl of rage, and sprang at him as spitefully as a cat.

The other boys looked on delightedly at the coming fray.

"Squar fur him, Phil!" shouted Joe Dot, as the cool youth stepped aside, letting his fierce foe come within an ace of dashing overboard.

Dick recovered himself and prepared for another assault. His small antagonist stood as unconcerned as though a fight was the spice of life to him.

But the deadly fray was destined to be nipped in the bud.

"Get out of that, you blasted wharf-rats!" cried a burly man, as he dashed past them, rope in hand. "Out, or I'll pickle the crew of you!"

He ran squarely over Dirty Dick, as he hurried to a wharf post, shouting to the sailors on board the vessel from which he had just leaped.

It was a large, full-rigged ship, which was entering the dock, brushing the black paint from her sides against the rough wharf logs.

Cursing the dilatory sailor who had come to his assistance, the man with the rope drew it in hand over hand, dragging up a strong hawser, whose looped end he dropped over the stout post.

"Lay on now, you lazy lubbers!" he shouted. "Don't let her slide off! Bring her up with a round turn!"

Dirty Dick slowly picked himself up, and looked ruefully at the burly mate.

"When a lokermotive comes along it generally whistles to git off the track," he said, with a grimace. "Guess these sea captings dont carry no whistle."

"Spose he wouldn't like you to feel which was hardest, his cocoanut or a brickbat," growled Phil, indignantly. "If we is boys, we aint pavin'-stones, fur furriners to scrape their feet on."

"What the blazes are you grumbling about?" queried the mate, turning suddenly on the angry group of boys. "You were fighting one another a minute ago. Do you want to fight me?"

"Jist as lieve as not," replied Phil, boldly. "Spose we was wharf rats; that dont make you no better than a salt-water lubber. I dont allow no sea-monkey to climb over me."

The burly sailor gave an amused look at his diminutive antagonist. Then he called to one of his men on board the vessel:

"Fling me a rope's end, Jack. Here's a blow-fly whose wings want dusting."

A short piece of rope was thrown him from on board the vessel, and several laughing faces appeared over the bulwarks, anxious to see the impending fun.

The boys, on their side, huddled close together, and seemed disposed to show fight.

"Come ahead with your patent, double-jointed old duster," cried Phil. "Come 'long, you bow-legged jiant, and see if there aint no fun in the dwarfs."

And in fact the dwarfs bristled up so spitefully that the mate hesitated a minute before entering into a contest with them.

The quarrel was interrupted by a loud call from the captain, who had sprung up on the heel of the bowsprit.

"Warely, men! Bring her head well up! Once more and we have her.—Leave the boys alone, Mr. Hendricks. You will do better by attending to the ship."

The short, angry ring of the captain's voice startled the mate. With a fierce glance at the boys he flew to the bow of the vessel, where another hawser was just being landed.

"Wonder how much he pays that dog-fancier fur whistlin' him off when he dont want to fight?" said Phil, aggravatingly.

There was a loud laugh from those within hearing. The mate hesitated and turned half round, knotting his fingers into the rope. But there came another of the captain's quick, crisp orders, and the sailor turned again to his duty.

The boys looked after him with an aspect of triumph, but probably not without an internal sense of relief. All save Phil, who unconcernedly faced his former foe.

"Now, Dirty Dick," he ejaculated, "s'pose we have that scrimmage out. We're n't a-goin' to let nobody else crowd on you. But you're my game, and I want you to squar yourself."

Dick looked with some dismay and surprise at his determined antagonist.

"But I thought that mill was off," he said.

"Not when I'm one of the millers," replied Phil, grimly. "I'm jist spillin' fur a fight. You an' me's got to have it out, if it's only fur the fun of the thing."

"Let that slide, Phil," said Joe Dot, coming forward as peacemaker. "And we'll give up the jiantes."

"It's a bargain," responded Phil, "if you'll guv in that there aint no sech rascally truck as that. I'm a straight up-and-down, east-iron, hickory-bark fellow, I am. I kin 'preciate jiant houses, and ships, and elephants, and sich. But when you go to tellin' them double-barreled lies it makes me sick, clean down to my big toes."

And the look of disgust on Phil's face was something to see.

Whether he wouldn't have tried his hand on Dirty Dick, "just to keep up the spirit of the meeting," was still a question. It was settled in another manner. One of the boys shouted out, shrilly:

"Hillo! By jimminy, there's fun!"

And he plunged forward, followed quickly by the others.

A West Indian barque was unloading at the opposite side of the wharf. A hoghead of molasses, which was being lowered to a dray, had come down with a run, starting the bung. A fountain of its sweet contents shot a yard or two onto the dusty ground.

In a minute the boys were in it, scooping it up with both hands, and swallowing dust and sweetmeats together with an air of the greatest delight.

"Aint it old splendid, Phil?" cried Dick, his grimy face shining with a new coating.

"Dunno," replied Phil, who stood a little aloof. "Dont keer much for 'lasses."

There was a rush of the parties who stood near, to help save the barrel. The bung had shot out, and was not immediately to be found.

"Get out of here, boys!" came the vigorous command of the drayman.

But the boys were not to be so easily moved.

"Here; I'll help them out," cried the black-browed mate of the ship, twirling the rope's end, which he still held. "Out with you, you gutter snipes!" he continued, whirling it shrewdly through the air, and bringing it down on Phil's back.

The boy turned in utter surprise.

"That's my back," he said.

"And this is my rope," replied the mate, who seemed to have a spite against the boy. He whirled it again, but Phil grasped it in his hands, and there was a fight for its possession.

With a quick jerk the mate tore it loose and brought it down again warmly on the boy's back.

But he did not appreciate all the powers of a wharf rat in self-defense. Phil darted back, and in a second had him by the leg, with his sharp teeth sunk into the flesh.

The man gave a howl of pain and strove to shake off his puny antagonist. But Phil would not let go until his teeth had almost met, biting viciously and deep.

"That's one," he cried, darting away like an arrow. "I owe you another yet."

With a derisive laugh the other boys ran after him, leaving the black-bearded mate cursing like a madman. The other men were too busy in driving in the recovered bung to pay much attention to this episode.

CHAPTER II.

BETWEEN DECKS.

THE Strongbow, the vessel we have seen just entering port, hailed last from England. She was laden with a miscellaneous cargo, was at once taken in charge by a custom-house official, while the necessary preliminaries to her unloading were being performed.

The crew loitered lazily about the decks, or took short trips through the town, there being little restraint on their freedom of motion. The mate had principal charge of the ship in the captain's frequent absence, limping about with many a curse on the boy, whose sharp teeth had for the time, effectually lamed him.

He stood by the rail on the second evening, wishing that Phil would make his appearance, that he might give him the kicking he deserved.

He little thought, as he entered into a chat with the inspector of customs, that his young foe was at that moment on board the vessel, coiled up in the forecabin among the sailors, who were seated about on their sea-chests, engaged in a desultory conversation.

He had made the acquaintance of some of the sailors in the streets, and as they rather approved of his punishment of the mate they became friendly with him at once.

It was in response to a pressing invitation that he had surreptitiously visited them at their sea home.

There were four of the sea-dogs present, three of them youngish men, the fourth a weather-beaten old tar, who seemed to have faced the storms of half a century.

Phil had coiled himself up near the patriarch of the crew, into whose face he looked with a sort of reverential interest.

"Dont like much to be on land?" he said, questioningly.

"Not me," replied the old sailor, in a voice that sounded like the subdued growl of a hurricane. "The ground aint stiddy. I like, when I puts my foot down, to know that it's goin' to stick. Cant be sure of that 'cept on deck."

Phil look at him as one will look at a new species of animal.

"Dont 'gree with you," he rejoined shortly. "I kin jist as easy dance on a tight rope as git over a rollin' deck."

"That's the fault of eddication," said another of the sailors. "If you'd been brung up out of sight of land, as all reasonable folks oughter, you'd knowed how to walk an oak plank in a gale. Somehow I cant help pitying landlubbers."

"Then it's jist even, and nothin' to carry," replied Phil, with a shrug, "for I've heered landlubbers pity sailors.—Had a good voyage, Jack?"

"Who told you my name was Jack?" asked the old sailor, grimly.

"I thought all sailors' names was Jack."

"Bout how old might you be, boy?"

"I dunno as I kin jist tell. Somewhere atween ten and twenty, I s'pose."

"Seed many sailors?"

"A clever sprinkle of 'em."

"And every sea-hoss of them was a Jack, hey?"

"S'far as I know."

"Well, then, put this in your pipe. My name's Ben. I've been Ben Bowling aloft and alow, in storm and in calm, these forty odd years. So jest correct your jography 'bout sailors."

There was an angry ring in the old fellow's voice, as if this was a personal matter with him.

Phil twisted his diminutive form into a sort of sailor's knot, and looked quizzically up into his new friend's face.

"Where does the Strongbow hail from?" he asked.

"From Liverpool last; but we've touched some French ports afore, replied another of the crew."

"Got a sort of mixed cargo, I s'pose?"

"Yes, sorter. Wearin' stuff, hard tack and pickles."

"We've got more aboard than the vessel was built to carry," said a third, with a solemn intonation.

"Dont be bringin' that up, Joe. The least said the soonest mended," responded the first speaker.

Old Ben had dropped his head into his hands, and seemed lost in a reverie. He now spoke somewhat sharply.

"I cant see what we're to cover it up fur. As I've said afore, and aint backward to say agin, it's brung bad luck on the trip."

"There aint no sich thing as bad luck," ejaculated

Phil, in his positive, matter-of-fact way. "Bad luck's only another word for bad management. The fellows that knows jist how to do things dont have none but good luck. There's only one bit of cargo, as I kin see, that's a bad bit."

"And what's that?" asked Joe.

"It's that curmudgeon of a mate. He's got the length of my eye-teeth for his one cut with a rope's end. See if I dont come up with him for the other." And Phil's eyes glittered as if it was in him to pay the mate dearly for his favor.

"There aint none of us too much in love with him," said the sailor who had not yet spoken. "So you can sink your teeth in t'other leg soon as you've a mind; and no questions asked."

"Guess I'll match him on another tack, next time," muttered Phil. "Thar aint no talent in using a feller's teeth twice in the same job."

"There's wuss than the mate atween decks of this here ship," growled old Ben. "That last bit of cargo that was hauled in at Liverpool is enough to sink the best ship that ever floated."

"What are you blowing about now, Ben?" queried another. "It's half a notion of yours. There was somethin' come aboard kind of mysterious, I'll allow that. But spose it did? The Strongbow has got her nose out of water yet."

"What was it?" asked Phil, curiously.

"That's what there aint a Jack tar of us can tell." "It's a miracle it didn't send us all to Davy Jones," was Ben's melancholy remark. "There's been something wrong 'bout the ship all the way over. There weren't a Mother Cary's chicken would rest its tired foot on our spars; and that's the worst thing that could happen a ship. I've seen many a good boat founder fur less cause."

"That's all stuff!" broke in Phil, impatiently. "As if a bird's wing could shake down good or bad luck! Guv me hard facts and I swaller them. But I cant go no nonsense."

"I judge you know everything in heaven and earth, my little bantam," grumbled old Ben, looking at Phil as a Newfoundland dog might look at a snapping terrier.

"I know there's nothing happens without a good reason," said Phil, decidedly. "I'm matter-of-fact right through, I am. Tell me apples grow on trees, and it's all right. But I dont take in plants, and mermaids and hobgoblins, nohow."

"Shoot me for a lubber if the boy dont know more than the ship's cook!" cried Joe. "Did you ever see such a little powder-monkey?"

"Maybe you'll tell what brung on the blows that followed us all the way across seas," said Ben triumphantly. "It's a doomed ship that a bird wont light on, and that the winds has a spite agin."

"Was the Strongbow the only ship afloat?" asked Phil, impatiently. "I spose they was all born to bad luck that got in the way of them storms?"

"I dont believe there was none got in the heart of the wind like we did," protested Joe.

"Then that's cause your captain didn't know how to handle his ship and sail out of the wind," persisted Phil. "It was all bad management, and thar was no more bad luck in it than thar is blood in a turnip."

And the young philosopher clasped his hands around his knee, and looked up with all the wisdom of a Franklin in his small face.

"Well, here's a flying fish, with cast-iron wings, and with the whole world biled down into his noddle," roared Ben, with a deep laugh. "Why, you desprat little imp, I'll bet a marlin'spike that you dont know enough to take a half hitch in a hawser."

"If it was in my line I'd not eat another mouthful afore I'd know how to make a double half hitch," said Phil unabashed. "A feller can know whar the light comes from without knowin' how fur off the sun is. And I dont b'lieve what dont stand to common sense; that's flat."

Silence reigned for the space of a few minutes in the fore-castle, as the ring of sailors looked down nonplused, upon the sturdy little practicality coiled up so provokingly cool in their midst.

Phil enjoyed his triumph for a short space, and then said:

"Weren't thar one of you smelt out this here bit of contraband cargo?"

"Not a mother's son of us," replied Ben. "And we was cur'us enough, you can swar to that. But the Cap and mate was too sharp for us. I've heered queer noises in the cabin, and there's been some things afloat that weren't on the ship's log. But it aint for a topman to crittercise what goes on down the companionway."

"This queer cargo aint landed yet?" said Phil questioningly.

"No, ner wont through the customs," said Ben, positively. "Bet you high it aint on the ship's manifest. But if there aint a queer bundle of dry-goods slips ashore some dark night when the customs officer is a-winking, then I dont know a bow-sprit from a tiller."

"Think so, eh?" asked Phil, with curious interest.

"I'd be willing to go my last hair on it."

"Then if I dont hire Phil Hardy out fur an Uncle Sam's Inspector, thar aint no snakes," cried Phil.

"Thar'll be lively times for that frisky mate if he tries to work any traverse, that's me."

"Look out he dont pay you out with the other end of the rope," warned Joe, laughingly.

"His rope aint long enough. He'll soon come to the end of it," was Phil's positive answer. "Guess I'll git now."

The mate failed to see a small bundle of humanity that crept across the deck, and into the gloom of the night.

But he was so busy in his chat with the Inspector that he had no eyes for the mysterious things going on behind his back.

CHAPTER III.

GRANDMOTHERS AND SWEETHEARTS.

In one of the streets in the neighborhood of the East river in a tenement house that looked, outside and inside, considerably the worse for wear, dwelt our young friend. Phil was an orphan, with only his old grandmother to take care of him, and together they sumptuously occupied two or three apartments in the upper portion of the great edifice.

The old lady, small, spruce, active and good-humored, thought the world of Phil, and made life as light for him as her brisk old hands could manage. She had a small income, which was eked out by Phil's scanty earnings, and partly by that cheery disposition which makes poverty a light weight.

But on the morning after the boy's visit to the sailors she was in a mint of trouble.

"You can say what you please; he might be drowned. Or locked up maybe. It wouldn't be the first time." And she wiped a stealthy tear away from the corner of her eye. "I do wish Phil weren't so full of fight. The police have a hankering after boys that show fight."

She was mechanically setting the breakfast-table as she went through this soliloquy, with a sort of instinctive hope that the smell of victuals might draw the missing one home.

"He's been out all night before, or I might worry," she continued. "He says he can always take care of himself. But I dont know. What's a little mouse like him in a great nest of cats, that this New York is? I do wish he'd come!"

Her wish was answered by a lively whistle on the stairs. The door was flung open with boyish vigor, and Phil came bustling into the room.

"Now dont worry, and dont scold, granny," he cried, catching and kissing the old lady, as if to take the sting out of her tongue. "Couldnt help it. Been on duty. You kin see I'm sound, and jist livelier than a cricket."

And Phil stood on his head and turned a somersault to his feet again, in proof of his liveliness.

"What you got for breakfast, granny? I'm as hungry as a two-year-old cat. Been up all night on business. Want a bite of victuals, and then a long snooze."

"Got some fried liver and ing'lins. That's what you like, I know. But, where has my boy been?" And the old lady bustled about him with a face shining with affection.

"Too hungry to talk now. Tell you the whole story after breakfast," said Phil, seating himself impatiently at the table.

"But, my boy hasn't washed his face and hands yet," said Mrs. Hardy, anxiously. "And they aint over clean."

"Oh! a little dirt wont hurt," replied the young philosopher. "I dont mind it, and so you needn't."

"Why, he's as grimy as a blacksmith," exclaimed the old lady. "Come here at once, you little black-an-oor, and give your face a scrubbing!" and she took the laughing boy by the shoulders and set him in front of a full basin of water.

"Feared I'd dirty the water," protested Dick, looking at it ruefully.

"Come now. It spoils the taste of ing'lins to eat them with soiled hands," declared Mrs. Hardy, laughing.

"Dont hurt their smells, anyhow," remarked Phil, plunging his face and hands into the basin, and scrubbing away vigorously.

The old lady bustled about him, bringing a towel, and wiping his cheeks and nose so vigorously that it looked as if she had a design to deprive him of the latter important member.

"Guess that's enough for one rub," cried Phil, escaping from her with red, shiny face. "Like to have some skin left. Now, granny, for the liver and onions."

Mrs. Hardy's breakfast was largely made up of satisfaction in Phil's fresh appetite. She ate daintily herself, but the hungry lad made up for all her deficiencies.

"Boys must eat. That's the way they grow," she soliloquized. "Now, child, give me that coat. You've been in the mud again. And see where he's started the stitches! I declare you keep me busy, scrubbing and sewing."

"I dunno how it is, granny," was Phil's apology. "Mud kind of goes for me. Bet if I was to be in a place floored with clean towels, and with lookin'-glass walls, I'd git muddy, somehow. Must be the dirt that I'm made of, coming out. Cant account fur it no other way. Go ahead, and I'll tell you all about what's kept me. Mought have to be two or three nights out."

Phil proceeded with a description of his late adventures, finishing by relating that he had been up all night watching the Strongbow.

"They're a-trying to shut up Uncle Sam's blind eye," he continued. "Now I'm a citizen of these yere United States of Ameriky, and I aint a-going to stand it. That's my lay."

The old lady looked with pride at the dignified attitude of the young hero as he rose erect in his enthusiasm.

"That's right, honey," she said, stroking his short hair admiringly. "Now lay down and get a snooze while I clean up the breakfast things."

Phil slept as heartily as he had eaten, his snooze lasting till near dinner-time. Mrs. Hardy went cheerily on with her housekeeping duties, singing softly to herself as she looked on the handsome sleeping lad, and knowing from old experience that thunder would not waken him.

After dinner Phil, with his usual hearty kiss, left granny to her sewing, and went down-stairs whistling the balance of the tune which he had started on coming up.

He had reached the landing below, and was making for the next flight of stairs, when he was interrupted by a sudden obstacle.

The door of an adjoining room had opened, and a young lady, of less than his own age, stood in the passage, her arms extended from wall to wall.

It was one of those sweet, fresh, sunny faces, in which beauty and brightness are linked in every feature. Long, waving, soft brown hair twined like a frame round the picture of her face, while a merry smile twinkled in her eyes and displayed the pearly evenness of her teeth.

"You cant pass, you truant, till you tell where you have been and where you are going. I have been up to see Mrs. Hardy and I know you were out all night. Oh! jist to think of it, Phil!"

"I've been out all night afore," he said, with a sense of shame.

"Yes, that horrid night that you fought, and got locked up. I hope, ever so much, it wasn't the same thing again." And the little beauty's eyes were full of trouble.

"You know it wasn't, if you've been to see granny."

"Oh! that was early, before you came home this morning."

"You're a dear little tease, Susy. Set down here and I'll tell you all about it."

And, seated at the head of the stairs, nestled cozily against each other for support, Phil proceeded to again tell the story of his adventures.

Susy did not quite share his disgust at the giant episode of the narration. She had more poetry in her composition than Phil. But when he came to the whipping he had received from the angry mate, her brown eyes flashed with indignation, and she coiled her young arms protectingly around him. Nor was she at all shocked at hearing how the youthful savage had bitten his antagonist.

"It served him jist right," she exclaimed, shaking her long curls in triumph. "Biting isn't nice, I know; but then—" and she looked the rest of her opinion.

But when Phil came to the revelation of the sailors her interest culminated. There was a delightful spice of mystery about it that went straight to her romantic heart.

"Oh, Phil, I hope you will find it all out!" she cried. "I know it isn't dry-goods, as old Ben said. For if it was what would they want to act so strange for? There's some great wrong-doing, some dreadful business, I fear. And I want you to go right on and discover it all, and tell me all about it."

And her face glowed with enthusiasm.

"I'll do my best, Susy," he quietly replied. "It mought prove a risky biness, but I aint going to be dray back for a trifle of risk."

"Then you must not do it, Phil," she exclaimed, with sudden alarm. "I would not have you hurt for anything."

"Dont you be afeared, little gal," he said, laughing. "When they larn how to tread on a lively weasel they'll know how to hurt Phil Hardy. And not sooner.—Guess it's time I was slidin'."

But it was not so easy to slide away from his voluble young friend. A full half hour elapsed ere Phil could get away from the irrepressible little beauty.

"You aren't going that way?" she cried, looking at him reproachfully out of her great brown eyes.

"No, little sweetheart," he replied, turning and throwing his arms around her neck, while he kissed her with warm affection. "Jist you wait, Susy. I'll tell you everything, as fast as I find it out."

In a minute more Phil was out of sight at the bottom of the stairs, and Susy, flinging the long hair out of her eyes, turned and went singing into the apartment from which she had emerged.

There were plentiful signs of poverty about the child, in her patched short clothes and bare feet. But there were in her face traces of that indomitable spirit and cheerful soul which defy poverty and its attendant ills.

But we must hasten forward through this slow-moving day until night again settles over the great city.

It is a starless night. Thick clouds have gathered over the sky, and the June air is close and sultry.

Along the wharves the great ships heave and pulse like breathing things, chafing uneasily against the stout timbers of the piers as the inflowing tide lifts their massive hulls.

The Strongbow rests in deadly silence. Not a sign of life is on her deck. The neighboring wharf is becoming covered with her discharging cargo, and right and left the wharf guardian paces like an uneasy spirit of the night.

But there are uneasy spirits on board the ship as well. A whisper of voices sounds from the companionway. Then a figure emerges and steps from the vessel to the wharf, accosting the watchman as he does so.

"Is it you, Captain Monroe?" asks the latter.

"Yes. I can't sleep. It's too blamed hot. Guess I'll take a breath of air."

"There aint much here," replied the watchman.

The two men walked up and down for a few minutes, chatting. Then a welcome invitation to imbibe came from the captain, and they adjourned to a public house across the way, the light in whose window showed that it still extended its invitation to man and beast.

They were absent not five minutes; yet in that time something had happened on board the Strongbow.

The black-bearded face of the mate appeared, looking warily around. He disappeared in the cabin again, and almost instantly emerged, bearing in his arms a long, heavy bundle.

This he carried across the deck, and lowered carefully into a boat which rubbed the vessel's side.

In a moment more he had cast off from the ship, and was rowing heedfully out into the stream.

He did not notice a pair of keen eyes that glittered like diamonds in the darkness of the next wharf. Nor did he hear the fall of a pair of light feet, that carried their owner from pier to pier, following closely the movements of the rower.

In this careful way he rowed along for a considerable distance, pausing occasionally and looking watchfully out into the bay.

At length, after a longer inspection than usual, he turned the boat and rowed directly outward. The spy on the pier looked after him with a rueful glance. The boat had not gone twenty yards, however, before it again paused. The dip of oars was heard outside, and a long, stout boat of the harbor police came dimly into view, slowly patrolling the stream.

The mate's boat was yet in the shadow of the wharves. He now pulled noiselessly back. As his skiff touched the side of the pier he sprang ashore, quickly twining the painter about a spile.

There was no watchman at this wharf, a fact of which the mate had probably been aware. Reaching into the boat in a minute more he had drawn up his heavy bundle.

Closely clasping it in his powerful arms, he walked slowly across the dark pier, utterly unaware that his every movement was closely observed.

A short distance brought him to the opposite side of the street adjoining the wharves. This was occupied with warehouses, produce stores, and all manner of business, prominent among which was the usual sprinkling of grog-shops.

Stopping opposite one of these latter, which was now firmly closed and dark, the mate gave a low knock at the door, repeating it in the manner of a previously-arranged signal.

There was no response, and he waited impatiently for a minute before repeating his signal in a louder manner.

Now the door was carefully opened and a man's frowny head protruded.

"Is it you, Mr. Hendricks?"

"Yes. Is all clear?"

"As a daisy."

"Open out then, and let me in; for this is getting confounded heavy."

In another minute he had disappeared with his burden and the door closed tightly behind him.

"Holed! If he aint I'm a sinner!" spoke a low, boyish voice, as a diminutive form crossed the street and looked critically at the house.

"I know Tim Fagan's like a book," he muttered. "And it aint any too respect'ble neither. I'm bound to git inter this shanty and find out what's in that bundle, or bust."

He walked backward, noting the house with the eye of an architect.

CHAPTER IV.

PHIL AS A BURGLAR.

It was now approaching the hour of midnight, and the darkness increased as the clouds seemed to gather more densely. This portion of the wharf avenue was but sparsely lighted with street-lamps, and the faint gleam from the nearest one fell but dimly on Tim Fagan's groggery.

But Phil drew back to the shelter of a small office on the wharf, lest he should be seen by some vigilant inmate of the house. Here he lurked, eagerly scanning the building before him, and waiting developments.

It was an old-fashioned house, apparently one of the relics of the New York of the past, two stories in height; with peaked roof, forming a narrow attic, and with a wide chimney, built in the days before coal came into fashion.

All these details Phil noted with an observant eye. A narrow alley, which ran between this house and the adjoining one, also came under his observation.

"Mought have to commit burglary afore the night's over," he muttered. "And it's as well to know the pints. I'm kind of took with that chimney. Looks big enough for two boys!"

He was now attracted by a light which shone faintly through certain cracks in the lower windows.

It then disappeared, and a minute after was seen through the windows of the second floor. There seemed to be two rooms in the front of the house, and the light was in the one to the left. Phil strained his eyes to see into this apartment, but the window nearest which the light appeared was closed with a curtain, drawn heavily down.

He could just see one or two moving figures, but could make out nothing of their actions.

He had not many minutes to observe. The light disappeared. In a moment more the door was cautiously opened, and the forms of two men became visible. Some talk in a low tone ensued. Then one of the men, whom Phil at once recognized as the mate, came down across the wharf. It was but the work of a minute to cast off his line and enter his boat, which he rowed away with the same caution that he had used in approaching.

The house was now again closed. Phil retained his post for a few minutes longer, his eyes fixed dubiously on the front. The light again shone for a moment in the room in which the mate's burden seemed to have been left. It then moved on and entered the adjoining room. In five minutes more every trace of light was gone. The house lay in impenetrable darkness, save where the faint lamp-light touched its front, and a fainter gleam from the moon, which had now broken through a rift in the clouds, fell on its roof and through its open windows.

"I'm a goin' to go through that house or bust,"

said Phil, with set lips, "and that afore the next tide turns."

Satisfied that there was no mode of entrance available from the front, Phil next turned his attention to the rear, crossing the street cautiously, and passing up the alley by the side of the house. This terminated in a gate, which was closed, but, as it proved, not locked.

"Here's a neat bit of chance," muttered Phil. "Not luck. Dont b'lieve in no such thing as luck. Now let's see how the land lays."

He had passed through the gate, and found himself in the yard of Fagan's house.

The slanting roof came down lower on this side than in front, reaching nearly to the roof of a shed-like structure, an addition to the original house, which served the purpose of a kitchen.

It was of frame, and one story in height; its door and windows firmly closed. Phil looked at it with a critical eye. Two dormer windows broke the line of the roof above. But to reach them seemed not so easy a matter.

"Granny says I'm somethin' of a cat," muttered the boy, as he glanced upward. "That's a steep bit of shingling, and there aint no ladder to shin up this shed. But thar was never a feller yit got rid of trouble by lookin' and wishin'. Guess I'll see jist how much of a cat I am."

He soon proved that no ladder was needed for the first part of his task.

A bench stood against the rear of the shed. On this he planted an old chair. Mounting on the latter and grasping the upper sill of the door, he swung himself lightly upward, until his upreaching hand seized the edge of the roof.

Now a moment's writhing and squirming followed, the boy swinging loose in mid-air. One jerk upward and the other hand had caught the roof. In an instant more the vigorous and agile lad had lifted himself upward and had a knee on the sharp eaves.

This was victory for him. Ere a breath could have been drawn he was lying flat on the upper surface, panting from his exertions, and resting awhile before venturing a second step in his burglarious enterprise.

All was still about the house. Phil's movements, so far, had been almost noiseless. Before him lay the steep roof, which it was in his plan to ascend.

"Mought have been better to have posted the Customs, and busted in the front door, 'stead of climbing the roof.—But they wouldn't never b'lieved a stunted little rascal like me, no how.—Best git rid of these shoes, though. They're noisy, and they wont dig into shingles like bare toes."

Thus cogitating, Phil removed his somewhat ancient shoes. Dropping them quietly over the edge of the shed into the yard, he was ready to proceed.

Now up the steep slant he went, digging fingers and toes into every crevice of the shingles, and moving with cat-like persistency and noiselessness. One of the dormer windows was soon reached. Grasping its sill, the boy drew himself upward, gazing curiously through its narrow panes. All was dark within. He listened intently for the least sound.

After satisfying himself in this respect, Phil made a cautious effort to lift the sash. Here he was destined to disappointment. It seemed to be fastened within, as it would not yield to his hand.

"Here's a go," he muttered. "Like to know what they want to lock their windys for, way up here on the roof. 'Specially when gents is a-callin' to see them. Spose I'll have to try the chimney."

The wish was father to the deed with Phil. In a minute more he was making his way round the edge of the protruding window frame, and he soon reached its top.

The distance from here to the ridge-pole was not great. Clinging to the steep slope Phil soon surmounted the remaining difficulty. It was not ten minutes since he had left the ground and he was already lying prone on the apex of the roof.

"So fur so good," he said. "But I never calkerlated that Phil Hardy would be brung to play chimney-sweep. Hope they aint got no fires goin' in."

The great, old-style chimney, with its generously-wide flues, was but a few feet from him. A minute brought him beside it.

Phil's next movement was to extend his hand above the opening. A strong draft of cold air came up from below.

"All right," he thought. "Aint no fire there. Cant roast me anyhow, if they mought bile me arter while."

Lifting his head above the aperture he gazed down the open chimney. The place was of ample size, fully large enough for the passage of a diminutive creature like himself.

"Hope it aint a goin' to be too big," cogitated Phil. "Wouldn't like to drop through like a stone, and fotch up on the bottom like a bag of taters. Mought be hard on the taters."

Cautiously climbing to the chimney top he let himself down easily within. The fit was a closer one than he had thought. But this was all the better, as it removed the danger of slipping and falling.

Without hesitation Phil began the perilous descent, using his hands and feet like a true chimney-sweep. Pressing firmly against the sides he worked his way down foot by foot, half-choking himself by the accumulations of old soot which he disturbed in his passage.

The distance seemed to him interminable. Every minute of his descent was stretched tenfold in length. To make matters worse the flue contracted as he got lower down, till, at length, he could hardly force his way through.

"Hope I aint going to stick fast here," he muttered, uneasily. "There aint so much daylight as would show an owl's wing; and the Lord knows where the

bottom is. Judge I've come 'bout ten mile a'ready. Know I've been an hour at it."

As this last thought passed through his mind he was overjoyed to feel a sudden sense of ease about his lower limbs. The next instant his feet touched bottom.

He drew himself quickly down and found that he occupied a wide open space, a hearth apparently, but with some obstruction in front.

Pushing easily at this, it gave way and he had to catch it quickly to prevent its falling. It was a fire-board used to close up the old hearth into which he had descended, and which was no longer in use.

In what part of the house Phil was he had not the most remote conception. The room he occupied was intensely dark, and he was afraid to move lest he should make some unfortunate noise.

"Must be on the ground floor, anyhow," he thought. "I've come fur enough to be in a three-story-deep cellar. And I'm on the right side of the house. For the chimney was on that side, and it come down straight.—Like to see myself in a glass jist now. 'Spec I'm as black as a nigger that's been painted with charcoal. Got to warp myself out of here, anyhow."

After a perilous stumble against a table, which made more noise than he liked, Phil got down on his hands and knees and commenced a process of crawling about the room, feeling every object before him with great caution.

He soon reached a doorway opening in one corner of the room. Passing through this, he found himself in what seemed a narrow hall.

He crawled through the impenetrable darkness, and soon, with great satisfaction, laid his hand on the lower step of a flight of stairs.

"Thought I had them when I got into the entry," he said to himself. "Know jist where I am now, and it's all plain sailin'."

Up the stairs he went, noiselessly as a professed burglar. Reaching the landing at top, he found some alleviation to the intense gloom. The clouds had opened somewhat and the moon was shedding a faint illumination. Some impress of its beams came through a window near him, faintly lighting up the passage in which he stood.

He looked carefully around. There were several doors in sight, on either side of the passage that seemed to run across, from side to side of the house.

To his right lay the doorway of a room which he instinctively selected as the one of which he was in search. Stepping with infinite caution, lest some unfortunate creak should reach the ears of a wakeful member of the family, he reached the door in question.

It was on the latch, and opened at a touch. The moon, which was in the eastern sky, shone into this room more brightly, plainly revealing every object in it.

A slight shudder, compounded of hope and dread, passed over the boy's frame, as he saw, lying on a bed in the corner, the outlines of a long, slender figure, of the very shape of the human form. A second glance satisfied him that it was the same bundle he had seen carried by the mate.

Phil's hesitation lasted but an instant. He was too direct in disposition to spend a moment in thought that could be spent in action.

In a minute he was beside the bed, listening intently for any stir in the house, and bending curiously over the mysterious parcel.

It was about five and a half feet long, made of some dark cloth, securely corded at intervals of a foot. But the portion which lay nearest the head of the bed had been uncorded, as if for purposes of examination by the two men.

The dark material was partly opened, showing something within that gave the boy an involuntary quiver of apprehension.

He stood a moment as if half afraid of the mystery which he had invoked, his eyes slowly tracing the outlines of the cloth.

Then, with a quick movement, he threw open the two folds of the dark covering.

Partly prepared, as he had been, for what he was to see, Phil started suddenly back, with an incautious noise.

For there lay revealed before him, in waxy paleness, the outlines of a dead woman's face.

A beautiful face, with delicately-chiseled features, showing spectral-like in the dim light.

Phil stepped forward to inspect it more closely; but at that instant the moon passed behind a cloud, and the ghostly face vanished as if it had indeed been that of a specter.

The boy stood dazed and fearful, the magnitude of his discovery slowly making its way through his mind.

He was roused from his reverie by a sound in the next room. The noise he had made seemed to have awakened the occupant.

Phil heard him spring to the floor, and grope around, as if for a light.

With a quick movement the midnight prowler replaced the folds of the cloth which he had disturbed, and drew back against the wall of the room, every nerve strung and his senses alert to the least sound from the adjoining room.

He heard the door open and a step on the floor of the passage. The gleam of a light came in through the open door. Phil glanced around with the look of a wild beast brought to bay.

CHAPTER V.

UNDER COVER.

It was a perilous position in which Phil Hardy found himself. What could a little midge like him do in the sturdy hands of Tim Fagan? And if this was a case of murder, as the boy imagined, they

might murder him rather than let him escape with his information.

Yet Phil's mother wit did not for an instant desert him. He glanced quickly about him for a closet. There was none in sight. The bed was too low to crawl under. He remembered that when on the wharf he had seen the light move directly from one room to the other. There must then be a communicating door.

He looked round. There lay the door immediately behind him. He tried the latch. It turned, but the door refused to open. It was locked.

Phil was in a desperate quandary. The rat had been caught in a trap of his own making.—But all his movements, so far, had taken place in a moment of time. The slow-moving step outside was yet some distance from the door. There was still a chance to make a dash for it.

He gave a quick step toward the door, and then halted with the thought that he could not possibly escape, in a strange, dark house, from a man thoroughly acquainted with every part of it.

As he paused in his flight his eyes fell on the bed. A new idea shot through his mind. He shuddered at the thought, but it was the only hope left, and there was no time to waste in sentiment or superstition.

With a quick spring Phil was in the bed, between the dread parcel and the wall, and had wormed down deep under the covers, keeping close beside the corded bundle so that no lifting of the bedclothes should be apparent.

The boy had often assured himself that there was no superstitious foolishness about him, that he was too matter-of-fact for that, and it was with a sense of shame that he strove to repress the involuntary shrinking which affected him, as he felt the outlines of the body above him.

"Didn't think Phil Hardy was sich a baby as to be afeared of a dead woman," he thought. "Live things is all that's worth being afeared of. Dunno what harm a dead corp kin do anybody. As fur sperits, there's only one kind that I know on; and I dont swaller that kind nor no other kind."

With a grim smile at his own conceit, Phil nestled closer under the edge of the corpse, and stretched himself out at full length.

He was none too soon. The step of the new-comer now sounded on the floor of the room, and Phil's alert senses traced his progress up to the side of the bed.

The boy was half-smothered for want of air, but he lay utterly motionless, breathing as well as he could under the circumstances, and listening with the utmost intentness.

He felt a movement as the new-comer seemed to have touched the bed, or probably made some examination of its dubious contents.

Then there came a voice, faint, far-off, hardly reaching Phil's quick ear under his shroud of bed covers.

"It all looks right," the voice said. "I dont know what it was wakened me, but I was sure I heard something moving. I had a sort of foolish notion that it was the woman. But she looks past moving."

"She's as dead as a door-nail" was Phil's unspoken reply. "And door-nails dont move without hands, so dont worry yourself, Tim Fagan."

"I wish Hendricks hadn't brought it here," was the next faint remark. "I am afraid he will bring me into trouble. I dont like this half and half business. I like folks to be either dead or alive, and done with it."

He seemed to have turned away with this last remark. Phil listened with great relief.

"The woman isn't dead then, but only playin' possum," said Phil to himself. "All I've got to say then is that she's an old hand at the job.—And now, Tim Fagan, I dont kear a brass cent how soon you git back to bed agin."

He ventured to slightly lift the bed clothes, so as to get a breath of air. Fagan's steps were receding. He stopped near the door of the room.

"I could have sworn I saw the bed move," he muttered uneasily. "I dont like that thing in the house.—I thought there wasn't any foolishness about me, but I dont like it. Why didn't Hendricks sink it to the bottom of the river and be done with it?"

"A mighty handy way of bein' done with things," was Phil's noiseless rejoinder. "I think he had a notion to try it on, if he hadn't been afeared.—That's right, Fagan. It's 'bout time you were gettin' out. And I hope you'll have quiet times and sweet dreams for the rest of this blessed night."

Phil got his head once more into the air as he listened to the receding steps without. They were followed by a fumbling about the next room, and then by silence.

The boy was too acute, though, to be in any hurry to move. He let a full half-hour pass before again stirring. It was still dark. The moon had not again broken forth. He heard a sharp pattering sound in the street.

"It's rainin', sure as fish-bones," he said to himself. "I hope it'll come down like pavin' stones. Like to have a little thunder and lightnin' too. Anything to help a feller out of this scrape."

He was now gliding noiselessly from his covert. In a minute he stood once more beside the bed.

"Wonder if she is dead, or jist shammin'," he said, gazing at the scarcely visible outlines before him. "They say dead corpses are cold as ice. I'll try this one."

He inserted his hand through the opening in the cloth, and laid a finger on the smooth cheek of the woman.

"Feels jist like velvet," he muttered. "And it ain't so cold neither. Jist cool, that's all. Sure as snakes the lady aint no deader than I am. If I

dont make Rome howl it's a caution.—And now, I've got to worm myself out of this here habitation."

A fly would have made more noise than did Phil in his outward progress. It was deep darkness again as soon as he had passed beyond the influence of the open window.

But he knew just where to find the stairs, and made his way down them with but a faint creak or two, which were drowned in the dash of rain outside.

"Best make fur the back door of the house," reflected Phil. "There'll be only a bolt or so to open there. And I want to git my shoes, anyhow. Wouldn't do to leave them. Dunno but my shoemaker's got his autograph on them. Aint a-goin' to let myself be smelt out that way by Tim Fagan's long nose."

Groping along in almost a creeping attitude, Phil made his way back through the house without tumbling over any chairs or kicking any tin pans. He felt his way back into the shed kitchen, and succeeded in reaching the door of which he was in search.

"Only one bolt, and that's a comfort," he said, as he cautiously pulled back the slender iron bar between him and liberty. "And now, I'll wipe Tim Fagan's dust off my feet. It's mean dust anyhow."

The rain was descending in a brisk shower. But, heedless of that, Phil groped round till he had found his shoes.

"If they aint full of water, I'll sell out!" he ejaculated. "Think I best go barefoot and carry them Wellingtons.—There's one blessing in the rain, anyhow. It'll wash the lamplblack off my face and toggery."

It would have done any one good to have seen him, if there had been daylight enough to reveal the inky rivulets that coursed down his features and his habiliments, and blackened the ground beneath him.

"I'll be clean as a new penny by the time I git home, that's one comfort," he thought, as he made his way down the alley, and into the deserted street.

Phil trudged homeward through the drenching rain, constantly congratulating himself on his good fortune in getting such an easy and clean washing.

"There mought be something in luck, after all," he soliloquized, as an extra heavy dash of water deluged him.

"Where are you going, boy?" cried a policeman, comfortably ensconced under an awing.

"Home," was Phil's short reply.

"What are you carrying there?"

"Shoes," said Phil.

"Stole them, hey?"

"I'd giv a quarter to the chap that would steal them from me," replied Phil.

"Then why dont you wear them out, and git rid of them that way?"

"My skin turns the water better. Good-night, Johnny!" and Phil was off at a run, for fear his questioner might amuse himself by arresting him.

He got safely home without further stoppage by the guardians of the night.

When his grandmother entered Phil's room, next morning, she gave vent to a cry of terror, and ran quickly into the passage, wringing her hands in dismay.

She had been unaware of the boy's return, and the sight she beheld was enough to frighten the anxious old lady.

"What is the matter, Mrs. Hardy?" inquired the occupant of another room, who had been startled by her cry.

"My poor boy!" she moaned in answer. "Something dreadful has happened to him, I know. Oh, Mr. Jones, just go into his room and look at him. I am afraid to see him again."

Mr. Jones himself was scared at the first sight of Phil. He had taken off and wrung out his wet clothes, and had them strung round the room in various positions to dry.

As for himself, he lay in bed, covered to the throat, and only his face visible. But such a streaked, dragged, and generally disreputable face was seldom seen on a human being. It looked like the map of Turkey, done in charcoal, on a flesh-colored background.

"It is some dreadful fever, I know," moaned the old lady from the doorway. "Or maybe the plague. That, they say, turns people black."

Mr. Jones's reply was to burst into a peal of laughter, as he passed his hand lightly over Phil's face.

"It is lamplblack, that is my notion, Mrs. Hardy," was his response. "A little clean water will be the best cure for his sickness. Been playing negro minstrel, I fancy."

Mrs. Hardy darted forward and passed her hands over the boy's face.

"As sure as you live it is the case," she cried. "The young rogue has been turning himself into a blackamoor."

This fingering of his face woke Phil from his deep slumber. He opened his eyes and gazed dubiously up into the two faces bending over him.

"What's busted?" he asked. "Is the house afire?"

"Where have you been, you reprobate?" exclaimed Mrs. Hardy, with as much temper as she was capable of showing to Phil. "And how did you get your face into such a horrible plight?"

Up came Phil's hand, and rubbed over his face lustily. He then held it up before his eyes, a blank look of dismay spreading over his features, which was succeeded by a merry laugh.

"Well, I'll be swigged," he said, "if I didn't think half the skin had been washed off of me. And here

I am streaked like a hyenar. Spose it's the badness washin' out of me. It rained hard enough to git down below the skin."

"To just look at the boy," groaned Mrs. Hardy. "And his clothes soaking wet."

"Got caught in a drizzle last night," returned Phil, with a grimace of his streaked face that set them both laughing. "Now you slide, granny, you and Mr. Jones. I'll git up and wash myself into a Christian agin. Reckon I'll have to put on some of my Sunday fixins, too, till these duds dry."

"But how did it all happen, Phil?" asked Mr. Jones, curiously.

"Tell you arter I git up and scrub my face a bit," replied Phil.

His visitors retired, leaving Phil to make himself presentable, and to invent some plausible story to satisfy the curiosity of Mr. Jones.

CHAPTER VI.

PHIL PROSPECTING.

Phil was quite a rejuvenated youth when he presented himself at the breakfast-table of his grandmother. His face shone as if it had been polished with emery. He wore his best suit, which set off his handsome figure to advantage; and his eyes sparkled like two rubies.

"Gettin' to feel like myself agin," he said, as he saw the old lady's eyes fixed proudly on him. "Sort of empty, too. Guess I kin eat my share."

"I am never afraid but what you will do that, Phil," she laughingly responded.

"Spouse appetite must be a good thing fur boys to have, or they wouldn't have so much of it," replied Phil, in a tone of apology. "Seems somehow to grow with me."

Breakfast over, Phil proceeded to satisfy Mr. Jones and Mrs. Hardy as to his adventures of the night before. But the story he told them was no more like the reality than his streaked face had been like the red-cheeked countenance he now displayed.

It did not strike him as quite advisable to make public his housebreaking enterprise, or to take too many confidants into the task which lay before him.

When he at length started out on his usual daily business of vagabondage, he found himself again waylaid by his little friend Susy.

"Out late last night agin, Phil," she said, shaking her finger admonishingly at him. "I could not sleep till I heard you come in. Especially when the rain come up."

"I was jist like a drowned duck, Susy," confessed Phil. "But I'm all right agin now, little sweetheart."

"And where have you been? And did you find out anything?" she eagerly inquired.

"If I tell you, Susy, you won't tell anybody? Not even your father or mother?"

"Nobody. If you tell me not to."

"Let's take a seat then, Susy, for it's a long story. And I know some of it will make your hair stand right up on end."

She spread her hands resolutely on her curling locks, as if determined that they should go into no such perpendicular freaks, as the two took their usual seat, at the head of the stairs.

Phil did not romance to Susy, as he had done to his former auditors. She was the confidante of all his adventures, and he told her a plain, unvarnished tale of his last night's work. But it was to her romance of the deepest dye. She held her breath in terror or excitement at many points in the narrative, and when Phil reached his discovery of the deathly face it seemed indeed as if her hair would stand on end.

"Oh, Phil, what did she look like?" Susy breathlessly exclaimed.

"As pretty as a picture."

"Are you sure she wasn't dead?"

"Tim Fagan said she wasn't. That's all I know, 'cept that her face didn't feel like a corpse's."

"But you haven't come to that yet."

"Well then you musn't git skeered at what I'm a-going to tell you now, fur I got into difficulties, Susy. But I'm all right now, so dont be gitting nervous."

She could not very well control her nerves, however, as Phil told of his peril and escape.

"You're a dear brave fellow, Phil, and it's jist as good as reading a novel, and I'm going to kiss you for it."

And Susy's arms were around Phil's neck in a hug which was full of nervous excitement.

"What are you going to do now, Phil?" she eagerly asked.

"Don't know, Susy. Tell you to-morrow," said Phil.

But it was with considerable trouble that he escaped from his young friend, and made his way to the street.

Our vagabond was not very well defined in his ideas as to what was best to do in these very critical circumstances.

His first movement was toward the neighborhood of the previous night's adventure. The house stood there still; as innocent looking and free from dubious secrets as summer sunshine can make a house appear.

The window of the mysteriously-occupied chamber was closed with a drawn curtain. This was the only evidence of concealment. Tim Fagan himself stood in the door of the tap-room, tall, raw-boned, muscular; with a thick red whisker and a fierce look about the eyes. Phil blessed his stars that he had not fallen into that man's hands the night before.

He'd been wuss on me than a lemon-squeezer," thought the boy, as he noticed the brawny bare arm of the innkeeper. "If I'd a-got into them beer-slingers, which I spose he calls hands, he'd jist

a-squelched me. If things keeps on this way I'll come to think thar is such a thing as luck."

Phil walked slowly away, deeply cogitating. His step became more decided as his thoughts took definite shape, and he seemed to have arrived at some fixed conclusion.

"I calculate the custom-housers ought to be the ones to take a job like this in; fer I know its smuggled goods. And I giv in that the business is gitting too weighty fur me."

In less than half an hour Phil found himself in the office of the New York Collector of Customs, having asked for and been ushered into the presence of that individual.

This gentleman was alone, and looked up inquiringly at his youthful visitor, as the latter walked independently forward.

"What can I do for you, my boy?" he asked. "Got five minutes to waste on a feller of my size?" responded Phil, helping himself to a chair.

"I have no time to waste on any one," was the smiling reply.

"Cause I spose you'll think it's wasted," said Phil, depositing his hat on the table. "It's jist this way: I'm on the track of some smuggled goods. I want a little help, fur it's kind of ticklish. And I didn't know where better to look fur it."

"What kind of smuggled goods?" asked the collector, leaning forward.

"Well," said Phil, hesitatingly, "I dunno jist what kind of merchandise you call it. It's a sort that you dont often look up in your warehouses, cause why, it wont keep."

"I have no time to beat around the bush at this rate," the officer impatiently replied. "What is this merchandise? where was it smuggled from? and where is it?"

"That's three questions in one, and you dont give a feller time to take breath between them," responded Phil, independently. "It's a queer sort, I kin tell you that."

"Will you answer my questions?"

"Well, then, it's a woman," said Phil, driven to bay. "That is, it's a corpse. Or I mean it'd be a corpse if it were only dead and not playin' possum, as I've got a notion it is."

"What foolish nonsense is this?" asked the annoyed officer. "I have no more time to waste on you, boy. Merchants, now-a-days, do not import women. There are more here now than they can conveniently handle. And as for the corpse that is not a corpse, that is a riddle I shall not undertake to guess."

"It looks like one, anyhow," muttered Phil. "I tell you this. Thar was a feminine corpse, done up in drygoods, smuggled out of the Strongbow last night. And it's layin' now at Tim Fagan's, on the wharf. And if somethin' aint done mighty soon I'm afeared there'll be murder."

"More likely a resurrection, if it is a corpse now," said the collector, ringing a bell at his elbow.

"Show this young man out," he said, shortly, to the messenger who entered.

"See here, Mr. Collector," said Phil, saucily. "Maybe I've got things a little mixed up. But I dont see no use in your bein' so mighty crusty about it. It's your business to look up smuggled goods. That's what you're put here fur by our feller citizens. Now, I've posted you 'bout a square bit of smugglin', and maybe a murder. I dont care a brass pignone what you do 'bout it. But if it's a murder, you look out. I bet somebody'll squirm."

"The police take charge of murders," said the collector, in a quiet tone. "Suppose you favor them with your conundrum."

"All sound!" retorted Phil. "I'll give you this for your pipe, though. I'm thinkin' of goin' into politics, and I bet I'll be at the head of our ward ring afore I'm in six months. So you look out, Mr. Collector. I'm a-goin' to make that seat of yours a hot one."

And Phil swaggered out, with his hat set jauntily on one side of his head. The official followed him with astonished eyes.

"What could have ailed the boy?" he mused. "His story was a most incomprehensible muddle. Is he cracked in his upper story, or has he really discovered something which he has mixed in the telling! At all events he is the sauciest young reprobate I have seen for an age."

Meanwhile Phil was making his independent way down the street.

He, too, mused as he went, somewhat in the following strain:

"Got a kind of steep notion that I've been making a fool of myself. It's a hard thing to say, but it runs in my noddie it's the truth. If Mr. Collector knowed what I was talkin' about he knowed a blamed sight more than I did, fur I got wimmin folks and corpses tied up in a kind of hard knot, and couldn't git the ticklish thing open.—And if I did sell myself fur a fool I stuck to it anyhow. I wouldn't go back on a thing I'd said fur enough customers to pack that big shanty full. Taint my way to git out of a blunder backwards. I b'lieve in goin' through, if it takes the hide off."

Thus cogitating, Phil made slow headway toward the wharves, the thought passing through his mind that perhaps he had best take the advice just given him, and apply to the police authorities.

"I jest spose, though," he thought, "that they'll worry me with all sorts of questions till I git impatient. And then I know it'll all be up. And it's 'stonkin' how little a boy kin say without it's bein' called impudence. Now I thought I was ridicklus perlit to that customer till he ordered me out. And fur all that I bet he'd swear I was saucy as a pet cat. It's jist odd what queer ways men has."

"Well, I'll sswow, if here aint Phil Hardy in his Sunday fixins; and it aint Saturday yet!"

Phil turned hastily as he heard this familiar voice

at his ear. He saw the begrimed face of Dirty Dick.

"Hallo, boss!" was Phil's unique salutation. "Oh! you needn't be squintin' at my rig. Been a-callin' on big-bugs, and had to spruce up a little."

"Wonder if he aint been to a fire last night?" said Dick, sarcastically.

"Oh, blow all that!" was Phil's impatient answer. "You didn't pay for them, and wont be axed to. So dry up.—Where's the boys?"

"Dunno," replied Dick. "Goin' to the wharf?"

"Guess so."

"All right. Trot along. I aint ashamed of you. Fur all that I've got a notion that it might do some good if you'd put that face of yours on a grindstone, and take off an inch or two of sile. I'd like to see how fur down the hide is."

"You be fiddled! I scrubbed my face, last Sunday," averred Dick.

"With the blackin' brush?"

"It's agin my principle to answer sich questions," said Dick, with assumed dignity.

Thus sparring the boys at length reached the wharf, the scene of their late quarrel. The Strongbow was now busily unloading. The wharf beside her was thickly strewn with her miscellaneous cargo, and a dozen drays were engaged in hauling it away.

Phil's enemy, the mate, was occupied in overseeing the process of unloading. He seemed not to have forgotten his late encounter with the boy. Phil could see him gradually approaching, in an apparently unintentional manner.

"Look out for black whiskers," said Dick, warningly. "He's sneakin' for you. Wants to pay you out for that bite."

"All correct, Dick. I'm a-watchin' him. If he comes it over Phil Hardy, he kin climb to the mast-head and crow."

The boys stood looking on at the unloading, seemingly unaware that the mate was nearly within reach.

With a sudden quick motion this individual made a grasp for Phil. But he calculated without his host.

The boy was ten feet away, with his fingers at his nose, while the mate came near measuring his length on the wharf.

"Guess you want my tother eye tooth in your other leg," said Phil.

"If I get hold of you I will settle for your bite," cried the mate, savagely.

"Maybe like you settled fur somebody last night," replied Phil.

"What do you mean?" faltered the mate, growing suddenly pale.

"You kin take it jist as you please," returned Phil, turning on his heel and leaving the wharf.

Yet the two boys hid in the shade of a neighboring house till they saw the mate of the Strongbow hastily passing down the line of the wharves.

"Now feller me, Dick," ordered Phil, mysteriously. "Thare's fun afloat."

CHAPTER VII.

A STERN CHASE.

BUT we must leave the boyish confederates, and follow their prey, Mr. Hendricks, the mate of the Strongbow, to his destination.

He seemed much disturbed as he walked hastily along the wharves, too preoccupied in his mood to notice that he was closely followed.

"What made the boy say that?" he growled savagely between his teeth. "It was no chance guess. The young hound knows something. He may have come to the wharf this morning just for the purpose of saying it. I am afraid Tim Fagan has leaked."

Reaching the Safe Harbor, which was the poetical title of Fagan's groggery, Mr. Hendricks turned resolutely in, not dreaming, apparently, that any one could have had an object in following him.

The brawny innkeeper was behind the bar, attending to the spiritual needs of a brace of rollicking tars. Mr. Hendricks called for a glass of ale, and stood slowly sipping it till the sailors were gone.

"Get somebody in your place, at once," commanded Hendricks. "I must speak with you."

Fagan called a young man to the bar, and led the way back into the house.

"Now I'm on hand," he said, when they had reached a rear room.

"How many folks are there about your shanty, Fagan?"

"Nobody but me and my wife," except the young fellow that tends to the bar."

"And do they know about—" and he indicated the rest by an upward twirl of his thumb.

"Mrs. Fagan does, of course. I couldn't hide it from her. But she's as true as steel. And she knows the kind of a fist I carry, too."

"And the bartender?"

"He knows no more about it than a street boy."

"That is not saying much, Fagan," was the mate's fierce answer. "Street boys know a good deal too much about it. Why, blast it, man, I was twitted to my teeth, not an hour ago, by a saucy little monkey of a wharf rat. Now I want to know who has been leakin'?"

"If he got it from me you can chew me up," was Fagan's decisive answer. "And I know that my wife has not been out of the house, and there has been no such chap in. Who was this boy?"

"Good heavens, man, I have not got a directory of the young vagabonds of New York in my brain," Hendricks impatiently replied. "He is a little creature, with an ugly red face, and I suppose about fifteen years old. And he has teeth like tiger's claws. That is all I know of him."

"He has not been in this house to-day then. I'll swear that," was Fagan's positive assertion. "If he knows anything, he must have got it somewhere else than here. Who about the vessel knows of this business?"

"Nobody but me and the captain."

"He might have been lurking about last night, and have seen you."

"That wont answer, Fagan," was the quick response. "I am afraid that the little villain knows the whole business.—Is it safe?" pointing upward.

"You can see for yourself," said the innkeeper, leading toward the stairs. "And I hope you'll get rid of it blamed soon, for I dont want to get into any scrape about it."

Hendricks quietly followed him to the upper room. There, on a bed in the corner, lay that which had so startled Phil Hardy the night before, a long, corded bundle, lying utterly motionless.

"She hasn't stirred," declared Fagan, in a low tone. "I'm desperately afraid the woman is dead."

"No, no," replied Hendricks. "It is a strong narcotic, which should not lose its effect before to-morrow. If it should go off, though, keep her quiet, if you have to use the chloroform; and force the draught I gave you into her mouth."

"I'll do that," returned Fagan.

"Let there be no bungling," enjoined Hendricks, decisively. "If she should come to and give an alarm, it might be a bad business for all of us. She must be got rid of to-night.—Mind you, if she should recover, that her pretty face and soft tongue dont soften your nerves."

"I have no nerves," protested Fagan, bluntly. "And as for her face, I dont care to look at it."

"It is the face of a beautiful young devil—or that will be a devil to us if she gets loose," replied Hendricks. "There's more than the money that is in it concerned in our putting her away. It is a question of safety now."

As he spoke he threw back the close folds of the cloth, revealing the beautiful, colorless face that lay so placidly within.

The two men stood gazing with hard eyes down upon that which should have softened a heart of stone.

Suddenly Hendricks started and grasped his companion's arm with a fierce gripe. He pointed sternly downward.

"What is it?" asked Fagan.

"That! Where did that come from?"

His voice had a threatening ring. His finger almost touched the face of the woman, on whose pearl-white cheek was visible a round black spot.

"I'll be shot if I know!" cried Fagan, with a quick start. "It looks desperately like a finger mark."

"It is just that," averred Hendricks. "And look here! Is that the way Mrs. Fagan washes her sheets?"

He pointed beyond the body, where grimy black spots marked the bedclothes.

Fagan stood for a moment as if stupefied with surprise. Then, with a quick movement, he drew the insensible body forward in the bed, and threw back the coverlets.

The sheets within had changed from their original white to a sooty blackness that would have broken the heart of a neat housekeeper.

"Yes, you can well open your eyes!" cried the incensed mate. "Have you put a chimney-sweep to bed there?"

Fagan did not answer for a moment, but stood regarding the bed with distended eyes. He then turned, as if the mate's last words had given him an idea, and ran hastily down-stairs.

Hendricks followed him more slowly, cursing in a low, ominous tone at every step.

He reached the front room adjoining the bar shortly after Fagan. That individual was standing before an open hearth, from which he had removed the fire-board. He was looking disconsolately at a heap of soot in the interior of the fire-place.

"My house has been entered last night!" he cried.

"And by your boy! Nobody bigger could come through this flue.—See here where he has wiped his sooty feet on the carpet!"

"You're a sweet specimen to have a delicate business in hand," exclaimed Hendricks, in a savage tone, his hand within his breast, as if half-tempted to draw and use a weapon on his dubious associate.

"It is your own bungling, then," retorted Fagan, with equal fierceness. "You have let the boy track you here. If there is any harm comes to me from this work, I'll be hanged if you shan't answer for it."

Hendricks was silent. He seemed to be struck by the possible truth of Fagan's theory.

"Is that all?" he asked. "Was there no noise? No other trace of a housebreaker?"

"Yes. I was awakened in the middle of the night, I dont know what by. There seemed to be a sound of some kind in the next room. I got a candle and prospected, but everything looked all right. I had a half notion it was the woman, but she lay as quiet as she does now.—My wife found the kitchen door unbolted this morning, but thought it must have been forgotten last night."

"And you got frightened away by a dead woman's face," said Hendricks, sneeringly. "And all the time your chimney-sweep lay under the covers, laughing at you for a superstitious fool, as you were."

Fagan's harsh face darkened as he answered: "It is as well for him! If I had caught the boy there I would not have left two bones of him hanging together.—There is one thing certain, Jack Hendricks. That boy knows too much for our safety. He must be got rid of."

"That's my notion. The sharp young rogue sold himself to me cheap, this morning. He has got to be settled. And the woman—"

"Yes, the woman," interrupted Fagan, with an anxious expression.

The precious pair of rogues sat and earnestly conversed for the next half hour.

"Then at two o'clock, sharp, to-night," announced Hendricks, with incautious loudness, as he rose to depart.

"Make it two. I will be ready," replied Fagan, following from the room.

They were quite unaware that the window had been raised and the shutter only bowed, and that a pair of sharp ears outside had overheard this appointment.

"Scout, Dirty Dick!" whispered Phil Hardy. "The game's afoot."

And the two young spies hastily left that perilous locality.

The day passed on; the night came.—It was clear and moonlit. But as midnight went by the moon sunk low westward behind the roofs and spires of the city. Only the faint starlight and the distant gleam of street lamps, broke the thick gloom which lay upon the dark waters of the bay. The night had all the stillness of June and everything lay in placid warmth.

The great ships rose and fell with a long, low pulse at the wharves and at their anchorage in the bay. A boat containing two youthful occupants, and closely hugging the sides of an unoccupied pier, rose on this same low swell from the ocean without. The seas and streams were far more tranquil than were their young hearts at that moment, as they anxiously waited for some expected event.

The hour of two tolled solemnly from some far-off belfry tower. Almost simultaneously footsteps and low voices were audible on the adjoining wharf. The boys remained silent until they heard the faint sound of oars. In a moment more they caught the glimpse of a low, dark boat stealing swiftly out over the dusky waters of the East river.

Their own oars moved as if muffled. No sound came from them as their boat shot out in the wake of the former.

For half a mile this silent flight and chase continued. The middle of the stream was reached, and both boats headed down toward the bay.

"Listen!" said one of the occupants of the foremost boat. "That sounds like an oar."

His companion stooped down and looked out in a line with the surface of the water.

"By all that's bad, Fagan," he replied, "there is a boat, not a quarter of a mile off, and headed straight this way. Pull hard, man, we may be pursued."

"Best lighten our load and head for shore," muttered Fagan, savagely. "We're too heavy astern. There's no better place than this for the job. Our unlucky ballast will sink like a stone; and there ain't a craft on the river can overhaul us with a light boat."

"Well thought of," assented Hendricks, harshly. "Wish I'd put a stone to her feet to make it surer. Pull ahead, Tim. I'll do the work."

Shipping his oars he stooped over and lifted the heavy bundle in his arms. There was a quick shudder. The folds of the cloth fell back from the woman's face, revealing parted lips and distended eyes, whose gaze fell first on the cruel face of the mate, and then on the dark, heaving waters.

He resolutely lifted her over the side of the boat. One loud, long, wavering scream rung out over the dim waters, waking echoes miles away, and reaching the startled ears of drowsy watchmen on the city wharves.

Then there was a sullen plunge in the stream, and all grew silent.

The boat of the murderers shot onward in an arrow-like flight, leaving only a diminishing ring of wavelets behind it.

The oars of the pursuers paused for a single instant, as that shrill, startling cry broke upon the unruffled silence of the night.

Then their oars fell again in unison, and the light boat sped rapidly forward.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WAIF FROM THE WATERS.

It was a critical moment in which the two boys found themselves. Phil Hardy's keen eyes had seen the murderous act of the mate of the Strongbow. Alarmed by the startling cry of the recovered woman, he had dropped his oars and looked quickly forward, just in time to catch a dim glimpse of what was passing before them.

Hardy had the splash reached his ears ere he had resumed his oars, saying:

"If you ever let out any muscle, Dick, now's your time. This boat's got to fly."

"All right," replied Dick, handling his oaken blades with the skill of an old boatman.

They had several hundred yards to pass over, but every well-timed stroke of their oars made the light boat dart ahead like an arrow.

"She's gone down solid!" said Dick, glancing over his shoulder. "There ain't a ripple."

"I'm afraid so myself," Phil gloomily responded. "If she is drowned then two fellers ahead had best look out for their mutton, that's all."

At this instant a dark object appeared on the water immediately in front of them. There was a slight splash audible.

"Down on your oars!" cried Phil, in low, quick tones. "Make her spin. Sure as shootin' it's the drowned woman."

A few more strokes and then Phil suddenly shipped his oars, and leaned over the side of the boat.

The dark object in advance was again sinking. It

had just disappeared under the water when Phil's quick hand stretched down and grasped some loose drapery.

"Back oars!" he cried, with startling vehemence. "It will jerk loose from me."

Dick's strong reverse strokes in an instant checked the speed of the boat, and his companion again pulled the object he had caught above water.

A woman's drenched, floating hair appeared; a face deathly white in the starlight, with open, staring eyes.

"Good, so far, Dick! But I'm afraid she's a goner. Salt water keeps some things, but it don't keep human folks. Let's see if we kin git her aboard without upsetting."

It was no easy matter, in their light craft; but the boys were regular water-dogs, and thoroughly knew how to handle a boat. After five minutes' busy exertion their heavy prize was drawn from the water and laid lengthwise on the thwarts of the skiff.

"Pretty well done," remarked Phil, panting from his exertions. "But I'm desperately of the notion that she's a dead weight we've got."

"That ain't so sure," replied Dick. "Turn her on her face and let her head hang down. I've heered that's the best way to let the water run out of 'em."

The staring, lifeless face was hid from sight as Dick's advice was taken. The long, drenched hair hung loosely on each side of the head. Phil took it in his hands and sought to press the water from it.

"Such hair you never felt, Dick," he said. "It's just like so much silk.—And see, if she ain't got her arms loose, I don't know nothin'! That's the way she brung herself to the top agin."

Phil was right. The sudden plunge into the cold water had completed the recovery of the attempted victim of the murderers. The bonds which confined her arms were loosened, and a short, violent struggle had released them.

The woman had just enough consciousness left to make desperate motions with her released arms.

This had brought her again to the surface, just as the boat of the two young rescuers had reached the spot.

"Sure enough the water's running from her lips," remarked Phil, as he raised the drooping head and laid it in a more comfortable position. "She's got our seats, Dick. We'll have to paddle ashore."

"Twont be the first time," replied Dick, taking an oar and establishing himself upright in the stern. Phil took the same position in the bow, and the boys used their paddles with considerable skill, making fair headway.

The rocking motion which they gave the boat rolled their inanimate freight from side to side, just the motion, though they were not aware of it, to aid in getting rid of the water she had swallowed.

As they neared the wharves they were startled by a faint, moaning sound from her lips.

"Sure as you're alive, Dick, she's comin' to," cried Phil excitedly. "Tell you what, hoss, this is a big night's work for us."

"Believe she is," asserted Dick. "Know I seen her arm move then. Let her lay lit we git to the pier. Want to squeeze out all the water we kin."

It was a somewhat long and toilsome progress. They looked anxiously around for the boat of their foes, fearing that they might be followed and assailed. But it was nowhere in sight.

A deep groan followed from the recovering woman, and then a convulsive movement of the body.

A few minutes more and then words came faintly from her lips.

"Where am I?" she asked, with a gasping utterance.

"You're in consid'ble better hands than you was an hour ago," answered Phil, joyfully. "So dont git worried. We'll have you ashore in the twirl of a cat's tail."

"I dreamed that I was thrown into the water," she continued, in the same faint utterance. "Or was it a dream?"

"Not much," replied Dick. "It was the widest awake dream I ever heered on. Jist keep quiet a bit longer, ma'am. You aint in much trim for talkin' yet."

She made no further effort to speak. But after a moment there was an uneasy movement of the arms, as if to release herself from an uncomfortable position.

"Here we are, Dick," announced Phil, a few minutes afterward. "Here's Joe Cowper's dock, where we berryed our boat from. Head close in, and dont make too much noise."

In a short time more they were moored beside a low pier, unoccupied by any vessels.

"Got a sharp knife?" asked Phil.

Dick replied by handing him a huge barlow.

"Want to cut these ropes. We cant carry the lady, and I'll have to giv her a chance to walk."

A few strokes of the sharp blade severed the cords which so closely bound up the woman's form. The enveloping cloth was thrown back, revealing the form of the woman who had been so long hidden in that dark shroud.

She was dressed in a light fabric, of silken luster, though now thoroughly wet.

"Lucky it's a warm night," said Phil, "or the lady mought catch cold.—Do you think you kin stand up, ma'am?"

The boys took her gently by the arms and assisted her to her feet, she making feeble efforts to aid them.

The boat rocked with the movement, and it was not easy for any of them to keep their feet.

Phil leaped lightly to the wharf.

"Give me your hands, ma'am. Dick and me, I guess, kin git you up."

She mechanically laid her hands in his. The tide was in and the boat rose near the top of the wharf.

A moment's strenuous effort, and they succeeded in getting their rescued waif ashore.

"Where am I?" she again asked feebly, looking at the two boys, just visible in the gloom.

"You're in the big city of New York, ma'am," replied Phil. "This is one of her piers, what we call Joe Cowper's. Some dirty hounds throwed you into the river, and tried to drown you. But Dick and me, we was about. We got you up afore you swallered too much salt water.—Though you're as wet as a drowned cat."

"Yes," faintly responded the lady, feeling her habiliments, which clung closely to her form. "What shall I do? Where shall I go?"

There was a hopeless ring in her voice.

"Dont you be afraid," answered Phil, encouragingly. "I'm goin' to take you home, and guv you to my old granny to take keer of. And if she aint as tender with you as if you was a baby, I'll eat my hat."

She looked for a moment into the earnest face of the boy; then placed her hand confidently in his.

"I think I can walk," she said. "You dont know how you have obliged me."

"Yes, I do," replied Phil, bluntly. "I know if we hadn't been a peg too high fur the mate of the Strongbow you'd been food for fishes now."

"The Strongbow!" she repeated, with a quick shudder, and a startled look around.

"I wouldn't talk about that now, ma'am," suggested Dick, soothingly. "Best git home, and git a sleep. Then it'll be time enough to go fur the Strongbow."

She yielded to them without a word more, both boys assisting her as she walked feebly onward. She gained some strength, however, as they proceeded, and moved with a firmer step.

It was a considerable distance to Phil's home, and they were some time in reaching it.

"Glad we didn't have to carry you," declared Phil, after they had ascended the stairs. "We're willin', Dick and me, but we're little fellers yet. Jist wait here a minit and I'll wake up granny."

In very little more than a minute Phil had his grandmother up, and had acquainted her with the main points of their adventure.

"Deary me!" she cried, anxiously. "A lady saved from drownin'? And my Phil has brought her here? Why, to be sure I will do all I can for her; and glad to do it too."

Mrs. Hardy came out, lamp in hand, and gazed, with deep interest into the beautiful, pale face of the lady. The latter had heard her kindly tones and looked up trustingly into her tender old face.

"I am wet," she said, simply. "I owe everything to your boys here. I shall be so thankful to you for a shelter."

"Why, certainly, and the best I can give you too," replied Mrs. Hardy, earnestly. "Come into my room, ma'am. You must get these wet things off at once.—Just to think of the horrible villains who tried to drown you!—Come with me, ma'am. I do hope you wont take your death of cold from this wetting. It's dreadful trying to the constitution."

With a faint smile the lady yielded to her importunity, saying:

"I hope not. I do not take cold easily."

She gave her hand to the old lady, who was nervously fluttering about her, but looked back at the boys.

"Never mind them," said Mrs. Hardy. "They will get along. They are good boys both of them. This room, ma'am, and she led her charge quickly into her own room.

"Kin we take care of ourselves, Dick?" inquired Phil, with an odd grimace. "I rath'er guess so. We could sleep on a clothes-line, if there weren't nothin' else handy. Where are you goin'?"

"Home," replied Dick.

"What! at this time of night? To git the edge of a broomhandle fur your breakfast? I dont think so. I've got room enough fur you to camp out. Bet our lady's all right now, in granny's hands. Come with me."

Dick gracefully yielded to the importunities of his friend, and the two boys managed to pass the remainder of the night in oblivion together.

Their recovered waif, too, slept well under Grandmother Hardy's fostering care, the kind old lady watching her as if she had been a slumbering infant.

CHAPTER IX.

AN AFTER-BREAKFAST RECEPTION.

MORNING dawned as brightly over the humble dwellers in the tenement-house as over the proud residents of the up-town avenues. And sleep clung to their eyelids until nearly as late an hour in the morning. For the nightly exercise of our friends had been rather exhausting, and the sun was high when they again opened their eyes to the comforts and discomforts of the waking world.

"Come, Dick," shouted Phil, shaking his bed-fellow roughly. "Goin' to sleep till dinner-time, hey?"

"Dunno!" cried Dick, rubbing his drowsy eyes.

"Long as a feller's jist as happy asleep as awake what's the odds? I was havin' the beautifullest dream, and I wish you'd let me alone."

"What was it?" asked Phil, indifferently.

"I dreamt that I'd been found guilty at the Tombs. Dunno what for. But I'd been sentenced to be locked up in a mountain of ice-cream, and not to git out till I'd eat my way out. Tell you what, Phil, it was just luscious! I had eat about a foot deep into the wall, and was goin' in headforemost like a ground mole, when you had to come and stir me up."

"I dont blieve in fellers that has such ridiculous dreams," responded Phil, with a sniff of contempt. "You're as bad as Joe Dot with his jients. Best git

up and wash your face. Reckon it'll be odder than ice-cream to you."

"You're a sour buttermilk sort of a feller," growled Dick, lazily yawning. "Dont b'lieve you'd allow a stone was a stone, 'cept it hit you on the top-knot. Well, spose I might as well git up."

"And here's a basin of water. Mind you wash your face."

"What's the odds?" returned Dick, donning his scanty attire with wonderful celerity. "It will only be getting dirty agin."

"Anyhow, for half an hour you wont be Dirty Dick, and that'll be somethin'. Come now, you cant be drowned in a basin of water."

And he led the reluctant Dick to the basin, and forced him to plunge his face into the clear liquid. Phil took the role of washerman, and scrubbed energetically at his uneasy friend. But the dirt was too long deposited and too well rubbed in to be taken off at one washing.

His face was still grimy when Phil let him go, saying, in a disappointed tone:

"Thought I'd like to take a look at your face, and see what kind of a lookin' chap you was. But it's no go. If I'd had some sandpaper now I might have touched bottom. But soap and water's jist wasted on your countenance."

In a few minutes more the boys emerged into the hall adjoining their apartment. Here they found Mrs. Hardy awaiting them.

"How's the lady this morning?" was Phil's first question.

"Still sleeping," replied the old woman. "I wouldn't waken her for anything. She is a perfect beauty, Phil, and she looks so sweet and innocent while she is sleeping that I am quite in love with her."

"That's the kind we go fur, granny. We dont trouble ourselves fishin' up your common, everyday sort of folks."

"There's been some terrible bad business," continued Mrs. Hardy. "It made my heart ache to hear the poor creature moan in her sleep. But dont you boys want some breakfast?"

"Well, I guess a little wouldn't hurt our constitutions."

"Reckon maybe I best be goin' home fur mine," suggested Dick.

"No, indeed! Do you suppose I shall ever miss what a little fellow like you can eat?" cried Mrs. Hardy.

But before Dick got through his breakfast she began to fear that the little fellow might start a famine in the house, for Dick had an elastic appetite, and Mrs. Hardy's cookery was a pleasant surprise to his palate.

When they entered the hall again they were greeted with the opening of the old lady's bedroom door, and the appearance of an apparition such as had never before been seen in that locality.

The clothes of their guest had not yet dried, and she was dressed in one of Mrs. Hardy's voluminous gowns, whose folds draped themselves oddly about her slender figure. But above this ill-fitting garb was a face like a morning sunbeam. It was still somewhat pallid, but the clear-cut, classical features, the soft brown eyes, the folds of dark, wavy hair, the tremulous beauty of the lips, altogether made up a countenance that affected them all like a draught of sweet wine.

"Good-morning, all," she said, in soft tones. "Are these my kind friends, Mrs. Hardy?"

"Yes," replied the old lady, her eyes fixed with a proud look upon the small but erect and sturdy figure of Phil.

"To whom I owe my life," she continued, holding out a hand to each. "I can never repay you for the service."

"It wasn't me," declared Dick, in a deprecating tone. "I jist went along to help row. Phil's the boy that done it all."

"Now that's not true," cried Phil, half-angrily. "You'd been drowned sure if Dick hadn't been along. I couldn't never yanked you out without him."

"Yanked?" she repeated, questioningly.

"Pulled you out of the water he means," explained Mrs. Hardy. "Phil has got a street gibberish that I can't break him of."

"Then you did save the lady! Oh, Phil, I'm ever so much obliged to you!" exclaimed a sweet young voice behind them, and Susy came dancing into the circle, her brown locks waving profusely about her face.

"I couldn't help it, Susy," he said, as if half-ashamed.

"Yes you could! And you're a dear good fellow! And I love you for it!" cried the excited little beauty. "And, ma'am, wont you let me shake hands with you? for, you see, Phil told me all about it, and I have been wishing ever so much that he would save you."

"Why certainly," said the lady, surprised at the charming young face, and earnest manner. "It seems I have fallen into a nest of kind friends."

She took Susy's hand, and stooped down and kissed the bright little maiden on the lips. The child's face flushed with pleasure at this warm greeting.

"I hope your enemies wont find you again," she exclaimed, looking shyly upward. "What wicked men they must be."

The lady trembled, a look of fear coming upon her face.

"I do not know what I shall do," she remarked in a wavering tone. "I am dreadfully afraid of them."

"They do not know that you have escaped," rejoined Mrs. Hardy. "You must stay here."

"Oh, no! I cannot intrude upon you in that way."

"Till the Strongbow sails, anyhow," said Phil,

bluntly. "Then you'll be safe enough. Aint you no friends in New York?"

"Yes," she replied, in a low, musing manner.

"Friends—and foes too, I fear."

"Who are your friends, ma'am?" asked Susy.

"I must not tell, just yet," she said, her face flushing. "I am very strangely situated, Mrs. Hardy. I fear I shall have to accept your invitation for the present. I shall repay you for your kindness."

"Don't talk of pay," was the energetic response of the old lady. "I shall not miss what little a bird like you will eat."

"You may find me a bird with an appetite," the lady replied, her whole face lighting up with a smile.

"What is your name, ma'am? Wont you please tell me?" asked Susy, nestling close to her new friend.

"Alice Homer, dear," was the answer.

"I know I shall like you ever so much," continued Susy. "I dont see how anybody can help loving you."

"Some seem to hate me, Susy," she replied, in a tone of gratitude to the earnest child.

"And I jist want to know who they are, and what they're after," broke in Phil, in his blunt way. "I'm a-goin' to circumvent them, if it's in the wood, and I want you to put me on their track."

"No, no," she exclaimed, in an agitated tone. "You must not interfere. Nothing must be done to let them know where I am. They are unscrupulous. They will find some means to destroy me. I am in the way of their schemes, and you have seen how far they can go to achieve their purposes."

"And they're in the way of my plans," Phil determinedly replied. "And I'm unscrup'us too. Or I reckon they might find me so. And I'd like to know how you ever peep to eucher them if you dont play your juck agin their ace."

"I fear them too much," answered the lady, shuddering. "They may have the money. I care not for it, if they only leave me at peace. You do not know how they have treated me. I was decoyed aboard their vessel by the basest of lies. I have been imprisoned during a long voyage. I know not what else happened until I found them about throwing me into the stream. They must have given me a sleeping potion."

"It's them then? It's the cap'tain and mate of the Strongbow that's a-doin' this job?" Phil queried.

"No indeed!" she cried, in much agitation. "They are but tools. There is another—a worse—behind them."

"I thought so!" exclaimed Phil. "I knowed it! I'd had them both in limbo before now if I hadn't knowed it.—What's his name?"

"Do not ask me. My suspicions may be wrong. I would not for the world say what I have been forced to think, for I might do a deep injury.—And, moreover, you are too young to cope with practiced villains. I would not expose you to their wiles."

"Dont you fear for Phil," Mrs. Hardy proudly exclaimed. "There is nothing too cute for him to do."

"I'll go a lemon-peel on that," cried Dick, a smile showing through his grimy skin.

"Phil's smart. He rescued you from them," said Susy, timidly. "But I am always afraid he is too daring. It would be too bad if he should be hurt."

"Dont none of you worry about me," Phil proudly responded. "I'm bound to come out head foremost, this side up with care, and all that. They'll wake up early if they discount me. That's me talkin'—Wont you tell me this man's name?"

"No, I may suspect an innocent man. And I shall certainly not expose you to further danger on my account."

Soft as her voice was, it was full now of firmness and decision.

"All right; I wont suspect an innercent man," replied Phil. "And if this man's n this here city I'm bound to fetch him.—I tell you what, Miss Alice—Didn't you say that was your name?"

"Yes," she responded, with a smile.

"I tell you what, if you only knowed what a ridiculous fit granny's old gown makes fur you, you wouldn't stay out here before two young gentlemen, like Dick and me."

She laughed merrily as she looked down at the ill-fitting dress, saying:

"My wardrobe, just now, is not a very extensive one."

"You ought to be ashamed, Phil," cried Mrs. Hardy, indignantly. "And I am sure Miss Homer looks very well in my gown."

"She'd look jist scrumptious in anything," exclaimed Dick, with intense admiration.

"I shall try and attire myself more to your taste, when my trunks arrive," she said, smilingly, to Phil.

"And now, will you be kind enough to deliver a note for me?"

"Sartin," said Phil.

"Of course he will," cried Susy. "I wouldn't let him object."

Many were the compliments lavished on Miss Homer, while she was absent in her room, preparing the note in question. Susy was quite bewitched with her, and Dick swore she must have something of the fairy in her.—This last opinion excited Phil's disgust who showed it by saying:

"She's a mighty pretty lady, and a nice one, I'll bet. And there ain't no more of the fairy in her than there is of the alligator in a cat. There's some thunderin' crooked business afoot; but if I dont straighten it out, sell me."

In five minutes more the boys were in the street, Phil bearing the precious missive.

"Goin' straight with it, Phil?" asked Dick.

"She didn't say there was no hurry," replied Phil.

"Come ahead, Dick. I'm goin' down first to take a squint at the Strongbow."

CHAPTER X.

THE RAT TRAPPED.

Phil was dressed again in his everyday suit, and was a very different specimen from what he had been in the finery of his Sunday garb. Mrs. Hardy did her best at keeping his clothes whole, but Phil was an adept at wearing them out.

The principal feature of Dick's costume was a coat three sizes too large and too long for him, and a felt hat that was a marvel of ventilation.

They made their way slowly down to the wharf, with as many digressions from a straight line as only a couple of hap-hazard boys, or a vagrant dog can make.

"I dunno as there's any hurry," said Phil. "Don't s'pose we'll strike gold, only that's always a chance that somethin' might turn up."

"Them fellars is sharp enough not to show their hands to a pair of little cusses like us," was Dick's dubious reply.

"I've got a notion runnin' through me that I'll go aboard the ship, anyhow, and have a talk with the cap'tain.—That is if that black-muzzled mate ain't around."

"You'll only git yourself in hot water," averred the more prudent Dick. "You'll be sayin' somethin' you hadn't oughter, and then there'll be a mess."

"If thar is, I want you to gnaw me out. And if your teeth ain't long enough git the other boys to help. Wont never do fur us wharf rats to let one another stay in a trap."

"All serene," assented Dick. "Hope you'll be keeful and keep out of scrapes, though."

The morning was well advanced when the two young explorers reached the wharf at which was moored the Strongbow. She lay higher out of the water, her cargo having been nearly all discharged. The wharf beside her was still heaped with goods, though busy draymen were rapidly diminishing the heap.

Phil looked warily round for his foe, the mate, but he was not to be seen. A few sailors were lounging about the deck, and some stevedores were getting out the last remnants of the cargo.

As the boys stood looking idly on, the cabin door opened, and Captain Monroe appeared, accompanied by a stranger. The captain's small, nervous figure, with his weather-beaten face, and rolling, dubious eyes, was in strong contrast to the tall, well-proportioned, and handsomely dressed person beside him. The features of the latter were regular, his complexion a pure white, while a heavy blonde mustache, well waxed at the ends, graced his upper lip.

The gentleman stood switching his boot with his flexible cane as he listened carelessly to the earnest words of the captain. The latter was speaking rapidly and in low tones, his eyes fixed warily on the sailors.

"Mought be somethin' worth hearin'," said Phil. "You stay here, and I'll sneak a bit. I've got ears as sharp as gimblets, you know! I kin pretty near hear the grass growin'."

"Oh nonsense! That's a gentleman. That's not the kind our game is," protested Dick.

"Fine feathers make fine birds, so old granny says," returned Phil. "The chap's got to have money to sport all that style, and maybe he's tryin' to rob our gal of hern. You stay here and sign to me where to go."

In a minute more Phil had sneaked against the side of the vessel, which now stood high above the wharf-logs.

The captain's friend had moved impatiently toward the bulwarks as if anxious to escape from his voluble companion. Guided by Dick's signs the young spy brought himself directly beneath them, though quite hidden from sight of any one on deck.

Phil had not boasted without reason of his sharpness of hearing, and his keen ears caught the low tones of the captain's voice, as he crouched low beneath the two occupants of the deck.

"That is all very well," the gentleman said, with some show of displeasure. "I think that he risked too much. But as long as it turned out right we will let that pass. I must be going now."

"I will see you soon, and report if anything turns up."

"If what we fear turns up there will be enough to report it," replied the captain's visitor. "We will have it served, well spiced, in our morning paper; and dished up cold in the afternoon editions.—Good day, captain."

"One moment, Mr. Cunningham," remarked the captain. "I forgot to ask you where this bank was." As he spoke he unfolded a bank-check which he held in his hand.

"On Broadway, opposite the City Hall," replied Mr. Cunningham, with one foot on the bulwarks, ready to spring to the wharf.

The captain did not immediately answer. He was perusing the opened check with dilated eyes.

"But you have made a big blunder here," he cried, forgetting his caution for the moment. "See here, sir. What does this mean?"

The captain's face was flushed with excitement as he pointed to the check.

"Well?" asked Mr. Cunningham, with cool self-possession.

"Can you not see, sir? Two Hundred.—What does that mean?"

"It means that the check will be good for that amount of cash at the bank counter."

"Hell's fire, sir! Are you an idiot, or do you take me for one? Is this a trick you are trying to play on me?"

"I think not," was the calm reply to the excited utterance of the captain. "And it might be just as well for you to lower your tone a little. I do not

know that I am indebted to you in any specified sum."

"You will find that you are not playing with a baby before you are done with me," exclaimed the angry captain. "You can take this bit of paper, and make the figures a more reasonable amount, or I shall make New York the hottest place you ever set foot in."

"Bah!" said Mr. Cunningham, contemptuously. "You can do just what you think fit. I consider that you are well paid, and I do not care a fig for your threats.—One might think this was the first check you have had from me."

"I bet a sea-horse it will not be the last," retorted Captain Monroe, in a lower tone than he had been using. "I suppose you think our hands will be tied, that we will be afraid to move.—Why, blast it, sir, before I would be swindled by any red-mustached land-lubber, I'd tie the hangman's knot around my own neck. Try this trick on, and you will find that I mean every word of it."

"I can't say that I have any objections, if you are anxious that way," said Mr. Cunningham, with aggravating indifference. "I hope, though, you won't make such a sensation. I don't enjoy sensations."

As he spoke he sprang lightly from the deck to the wharf, a distance of four or five feet.

"Don't forget, Cap," he cried out, as he walked rapidly away. "And see that the Custom House entries are properly attended to."

"Yes, you're rascally sly," muttered the captain, savagely. "Want to put the sailors off the track. I calculate you want put me off the track so easy."

Neither of them had noticed the diminutive form of Phil Hardy, who had slipped hastily away from his position at Mr. Cunningham's first movement, and was now gliding toward Dick from the end of the wharf.

"Foller me. And look as if you didn't know beans," he whispered in his comrade's ear. "The game's gittin' ripe."

Dick was quick-witted enough to take the hint, and slouched along behind Phil, as if he had not a care in the world beyond lounging in the sunshine. Nobody paid the slightest heed to the two boys, as they left the wharf, some distance in the wake of Mr. Cunningham.

The latter had entered a street leading up into the city, and was walking briskly along.

"There's fun up, Dick," explained Phil, as they followed the gentleman. "My first game's to strike where he lives. If he fights shy, then I want you to foller him like a sand-bur follers a cow's tail, and don't let up till you hole him. Spose he's a Fifth Avenuer. Mought think he owned New York from the Battery up, to look at him."

"Did you hit any game, Phil?"

"Dunno. There's money passed hands, and that's always duberous. Got to investigate this chap, that's all."

When the object of their pursuit had reached about two blocks from the wharf Phil hastened his steps, signing to Dick to lurk behind.

The boy came briskly up to the unconscious gentleman, crying in a breathless tone:

"Mr. Cunningham!"

"Well? What do you want?" asked the gentleman, sharply, as he noticed the figure of the boy who had called him.

"I thought you was the one, but wasn't quite sure," replied Phil innocently. "Captain Monroe, of the Strongbow, told me to run after you."

"Monroe!" was the impatient answer. "He does not want me back?"

"He didn't say so," responded Phil.

"What did he say then?"

"Only that he'd forgot your directions. That's what he told me to tell you, and to ask where you lived."

"He must have a devilish short memory," exclaimed Mr. Cunningham, angrily. "I told it to him not an hour ago. And he might have asked Hendricks, who knows it well enough."

"I'll tell him that then?" asked Phil, making as if about to return.

"Yes.—But no; give him this. Tell him to nail it in his mind, and then throw it to the fishes."

He gave Phil a card from his case, saying, as he looked at the boy:

"Do you belong to the Strongbow?"

"I lend a hand about her," Phil answered, turning on his heel.

He was not six steps from Mr. Cunningham before he had nailed the directions on the card in his memory.

"You're off duty, Dick," he said to that young gentleman, as he rejoined him. "The bird flew straight into my net. Got all I wanted out of him."

"Where now?" asked Dick, trotting along to keep pace with Phil's rapid walk.

"Back to the Strongbow, quick as lightnin'," Phil replied. "Got to have a little chat with Cap Monroe, afore some things git cold in his mind."

"What's up?" queried Dick.

Phil answered by giving his comrade a brief outline of what he had learned, and of his present intentions, suppressing such part as he did not care to divulge.

"Hang fire now," he said, as they reached the wharf. "You know the game if I'm nabbed."

With the bold movement of one who has important business on hand our young friend mounted the side of the Strongbow, and approached the captain, who was standing aft, looking moodily at the movements of the stevedores.

"Captain Monroe, I spose?" was Phil's questioning address.

"What do you want with me?" demanded the captain, surlily.

"Want to know if you're Cap Monroe," Phil sturdily repeated.

"Yes. And what then?"

"I was told to step on board and see you on important bizness. Them's the words he said," replied Phil, in a dignified tone.

"Who said?"

"That's his card. He said as you'd reckernise it."

"Ha!" cried Captain Monroe, his eyes falling on the perfumed slip which Phil had handed him. "Did he send you?"

"The man who guv me that card? Oh, yes. It was him."

Phil's tone was undiluted innocence.

"Come into the cabin," ordered the captain, with a cautious look around him.

Dick, from his station on the wharf, saw with some alarm this disappearance of his comrade down the companionway of the Strongbow, into those mysterious and doubtful regions below her decks.

Phil, however, advanced without a sign of fear or hesitation.

"Well, boy," said the captain, turning on him. "What did he send you for?"

"He told me I was to bring the paper he guv you. Them's the words he said. The paper you and him had just been talkin' about."

"Did he say what the paper was?" asked the captain with inward satisfaction at this symptom of fear on Cunningham's part.

"He said the paper. That was all," Phil innocently replied.

"But who are you? And what warrant have I in handing over to you an important paper?"

"I dunno as it makes much difference to me," retorted Phil, carelessly, seating himself beside a cabin-window of the Strongbow, which was open to let in the air.

"Did he give you no token except this card?" asked Captain Monroe, suspiciously.

"Yes," said Phil, in the most matter-of-fact tone.

"He said if you didn't believe me, I was to guv you this fur a password. 'The Alice Homer has gone to the bottom.'—Or some sich words."

Captain Monroe sprang to his feet as if he had been bitten by a scorpion. A hearty curse broke from his lips, as he hurriedly paced across the cabin.

"He spoke about idiots awhile ago," muttered the excited officer. "I'll be shot if he ought not to be locked up in a maniac's ward."

"Who?" asked Phil, opening his eyes widely.

"No matter.—I guess you are all right. Here is the paper."

"He is going to act wisely and add to the amount of the check," thought the captain, as he turned to get it.

As he did so, Phil felt himself touched from behind, at the cabin-window, and a voice in his ear:

"The black-muzzled mate! Look out! It's gitting squally."

"Here it is," said Captain Monroe, turning quickly.

"Hurry back to Mr. Cunningham, and tell him I said this, 'Captain Monroe's time is limited. If one man won't buy he knows another who will.'—You won't forget?"

"No," said Phil, putting his hand on the window, as if to assist him in rising.

As he did so the check disappeared from his hand into certain groping fingers outside.

Phil hastened toward the cabin door, as if thinking that his mission there was ended, and the sooner he got out of that locality the better for his health.

But he was not destined to get off so easily. Before he could reach the door of the cabin it was opened, and the black-bearded mate appeared.

"Hallo! Who have we here?" he cried, as his eyes fell on Phil.

"A messenger from Mr. Cunningham," replied Captain Monroe.

"A messenger from the devil!" exclaimed the mate. "Hold back, youngster," he cried, seizing Phil fiercely by the shoulder, as the latter was pushing past him. "How do you know he is from Cunningham?"

"He brought this password: 'The Alice Homer has gone to the bottom.'"

The mate turned blue as he heard these words.

He hustled Phil rapidly across the cabin to a door opening inward.

"We are sold!" he ejaculated. "This is one of the chaps that followed us last night. I bet high he follows to the bottom."

Dirty Dick hastily dropped out of sight, as he caught a glimpse of Phil pushed through a low door into a dungeon-like darkness beyond.

CHAPTER XI.

AT CENTRAL PARK.

We must leave the boys awhile and return to our lady friends. Mrs. Hardy has been busy all morning in drying and smoothing the clothes of her guest. She has been quite successful in her efforts, and Miss Homer has willingly doffed the old lady's voluminous gown, and is dressed somewhat more becomingly in her own attire.

Her dress is of a light summer silk, which shows scarcely a sign of its immersion in the water, and which elegantly fits her slender, supple form.

Above it her pale, gentle, clear-cut face blooms like a white lily, crowned above by a waving wealth of brown hair, and lit by the softest of eyes.

Little Susy Lane is at her feet, looking up at her with undisguised admiration in her large orbs.

"Do you know, Miss Alice," she says, confidently, "that Phil is just the best boy out? If you knew all the good things and the smart things he has done."

"I can well believe him a marvel of intelligence," Miss Homer replied. "And I think he likes my young friend very much."

"Me!" cried Susy, opening her eyes very wide. "Likes me! Why, I like Phil, too. Phil's my sweetheart, you know. And I am his. And we just love one another."

"Oh! It has gone so far as that, then?" said Miss Homer, smiling. "And I suppose you are going to be married very soon."

"Got married?" repeated Susy, in a tone of alarm. "Why, I never thought of that. Aint we too young to get married?"

"Well, rather," was the dry answer.

"The idea of anything so ridiculous!" And Susy burst into a merry laugh. "I do believe you are just making fun of me. I know it is only great, grown folks, like you, that get married."

A slight blush came on Miss Homer's face as she answered:

"You and Phil will be great grown folks some day. Then I suppose you will be marrying."

"I don't know," said Susy, coquettishly. "I might fall out with Phil. Or I might see somebody I liked better. Why don't you get married, Miss Alice?"

"Perhaps it is because I cannot get any one to have me," she replied, with a slight constraint in her laugh. "I don't see that you can do better than wait for Phil—I wish he would come back with the answer to my letter."

"Did you tell him it was in a hurry?"

"I did not."

"Then you won't see him before night. Phil is never in a hurry."

"Is that the case, Mrs. Hardy?"

"Yes," replied the old lady, from the corner in which she was bustling. "Phil does try me dreadful sometimes, for if he don't take a notion to go fast a steam-engine wouldn't hurry him. Why don't you go out and take a walk, Miss Homer, and rest yourself?"

"I would not know where to go. I am an entire stranger in New York. I should be lost in ten steps."

"Oh! I will go with you and show you!" cried Susy, enthusiastically. "I will take you a long walk—to Broadway. Or we will take the cars and go to the Park."

"Wherever you will. I am in your hands," replied their guest, courteously.

"I think you will like the Park," said Mrs. Hardy, enthusiastically. "It is ever so pretty a place. And then it's got marble statues, and fountains, and the sweetest lake, and geese swimming in it."

"Swans," corrected Susy. "The idea of calling them geese! Those beautiful white swans! You should only see them swim, Miss Alice. So stately and graceful. But may be you have seen swans."

"Yes, and geese, too," their guest smilingly replied.

"We will go to the Park at any rate. I am not yet tired of seeing beautiful things. But I am half-afraid, Mrs. Hardy. My enemies—"

"You have not so many of them?" asked Mrs. Hardy.

"Two or three, only."

"Two or three in a million!" and Mrs. Hardy laughed at the idea. "Why it would be like hunting the needle in the haystack. You don't know what a monstrous place New York is. And I suppose your foes have no time to spare from their rogueries for strolling in the Park."

"That may be so," admitted their guest, musingly.

"Oh, come!" cried Susy, dragging at her hand. "I will take the best of care of you. And if anybody says anything to you he had better look out for himself."

And Susy was comically savage in her manner.

"Very well, then, if I am to have such a doughty champion," asserted Miss Homer, laughing. "If you wear such a look as that you will certainly frighten the men into good behavior."

"You don't know how fierce I can be," exclaimed Susy. "Come on. I just hope somebody will speak to us, so that I can show you."

The two new friends were very merry as they rode together to the Park. Susy seemed to feel it a part of her duty to be as lively as possible to cheer up the unfortunate lady, and the latter forced herself to respond to the child's efforts.

It was a pleasant afternoon, and the Park in the acme of its Junetide beauty. Streams of showy carriages filled all the drives; and throngs of gayly-dressed people lent a charm to the walks. Children rollicked and laughed. Susy felt like it, but imagined that her position called for a certain measure of demureness. So she walked as soberly as she could beside her older friend, only breaking out every five minutes or so in a gush of merriment, or an incipient romp.

She was thoroughly acquainted with the lions of the Park, and showed them off with youthful enthusiasm—the statues, fountains, lake, swans and all.

And Miss Homer was thoroughly appreciative of the beauties of this charming pleasure-ground of the people, and was little less enthusiastic than her chaperone in her admiration.

"And now, Susy," she said at length, "we have earned the right to be tired. Let us sit here awhile beside the Mall.—Did you not say this was the Mall?"

"Yes," replied Susy. "And that is Shakespeare over there. He must have been very good-looking, if he did wear such an odd dress.—Who was Shakespeare, Miss Alice? Some great general?"

"A great poet, Susy, and that is greater than being a great general. You may see by his face that he is a thinker, and not a fighter."

"I thought that," replied the child. "It is so full of thought. What did he write?"

"Plays, my dear. The most charming plays.

He lived several hundred years ago in England—Oh!

It was a faint exclamation that escaped her lips, barely audible to her companion. But the latter turned to find her very pale, and in the act of drawing her veil down over her face.

"Why, Miss Alice," said Susy, anxiously, "what has happened? Are you sick? You look so very pale."

"I scarcely know, child. A sudden attack. Let us be going home."

She essayed to rise, but hastily reseated herself. Her eyes had been turned to the opposite side of the Mall. Susy quickly looked over in that direction, and saw a gentleman who had turned and was walking across toward them.

He was a tall, well-built man, elegantly attired, with a face which many would have called handsome, his eyes keen and cold.

"You will not object to my taking this seat, miss?" he asked, addressing Susy. "I am rather tired."

"Why certainly not," replied Susy, moving so that he might have the end of the bench they occupied. "Do not let me disturb you."

"You do not disturb me at all," she rejoined, looking at him with her clear, open eyes.

"Do you live in New York?" he asked, addressing the child, but fixing his keen glance on the veiled face beyond her.

"Why of course, I have always lived in New York."

"Indeed. I thought your fresh face spoke of the country," he smilingly replied. "And in what part of New York has my young friend always lived?"

Susy was on the point of innocently naming the directions of her residence, when she felt the hand that lay by her side clutched in a convulsive clasp.

She was quick-witted enough to take it as a warning, and equally quick enough to feel that it was not advisable to show distrust of her questioner.

"I have not always lived in the same place," she replied. "We have moved about a great deal."

"Oh!" he said, with a look of amusement. "Then your present residence— But I forgot, you have not said where it is."

"And I do not intend to," replied Susy, with immense dignity of manner. "I do not see why a fine gentleman like you wants to know where a poor little thing like me lives."

Her questioner laughed loudly, and yet it struck the observant child that there was not much merriment in the laugh. He rose and looked down upon her with a comical expression, his sharp eyes glancing at the thinly veiled face that was turned away from him. Susy felt a strong tremor in the hand that still held hers.

"I suppose it is an idle man's curiosity, which is often as bad as a woman's curiosity, my child," he presently remarked. "And as for your being a poor little thing, you do not seem to know your wealth."

"My wealth!" cried Susy, opening her eyes very wide indeed.

"Yes, wealth in good looks, and innocence, and charmingness. For you are a charming little girl. Good-day, my dear," and he walked away with a smile on his face.

"And you are a disagreeable big man," said Susy, under her breath. "I don't like to be talked to that way. And I don't like you, at all."

There was great vigor in the way in which the child brought this out.

"Is he gone, Susy?" spoke a whispering voice beside her—a voice that shook with emotion.

"Yes," said Susy, after a pause. "He is some distance off.—Now he is going down the steps to the fountain—to the lake, I mean."

"Then we must go! Instantly! He must not see my face for the world!"

There was intense eagerness and anxiety in her tone. She seized Susy's hand, and drew the child rapidly down the walk, stepping with a hasty, nervous tread.

"He looked close at me. Do you think he could have seen my face through the veil?" she asked, throwing it back to get a breath in her excited walk.

"I don't think he could," said Susy. "Is he one of the men you fear?"

"Yes! yes! I have not seen him for years. Yet I knew him at a glance. Look back, child. See if he is following us."

Susy took a long look behind, but failed to catch any sign of the person in question.

"I hope you are mistaken," she replied. "He is not following us."

"I am never mistaken in a face," was the excited rejoinder. "He will follow! He will not let me escape! Let us hasten, child!"

People turned to look with surprise at the pale face and rapid movements of the woman, who almost dragged her young companion. She was a swift walker, and it taxed Susy to keep pace with her.

Leaving the Park, they took a car for the city, and then first drew a free breath.

"I am sure I have escaped him now," she said, with a strong, nervous trembling. "I cannot see him.—Oh! how I fear that dastardly face!"

She became silent, falling into a moodiness of manner which the child did not venture to break, though her eyes were fixed with questioning pity on the still, pale face of the frightened woman.

They left the car at the City Hall, and hastened forward on foot. They did not observe a carriage which slackened its speed and moved slowly behind them. As they turned into a less frequented street the carriage stopped and a gentleman alighted.

He moved cautiously on behind them.

They were approaching their home when Susy, with a sudden impulse, looked sharply backward.

At a glance she recognized her questioner of the Park.

Miss Homer felt the quick movement of her hand, and looked inquiringly down.

"I wanted you to come in here with me," said Susy, prudently, drawing her into a small grocer's which they were just opposite.

The child led her friend hastily to the rear end of the store.

"If any one asks if you know us, Mrs. Jones, she said to a large woman standing there, 'don't let on. There's a villain following us.'"

"Come out this way," cried Mrs. Jones, pushing them through a rear door into an alley that led to another street. "I will give the gentleman who is following you my opinion. You can depend on that."

And the good-natured fat lady looked as fierce as her kindly face would permit of.

"Did you see him?" asked Miss Homer, excitedly.

"Yes. But do not fear. He will never pass Mrs. Jones."

They reached home quite overcome with the nervous excitement of their flight.

CHAPTER XII.

A TRUSSED RAT.

In the cabin of the Strongbow her two chief officers sat in earnest consultation. There was no sign of Phil Hardy. They had put him somewhere out of sight and hearing, and had been considering, with much dread, the possible exposure of their schemes in case the boy should escape them. There seemed to them but one safe course to take. They had already tried it with the woman.

To their hardened natures it was a small matter to dispose of this wharf rat of a boy, when their own safety depended upon it.

Several hours had now passed since the capture of the venturesome boy. His companion, Dirty Dick, was nowhere to be seen. To all appearance he had deserted him.

The deliberations of the captain and the mate were interrupted by the sharp opening of the cabin door, and the sound of a quick step on the floor.

They looked hastily around, to see their confederate, Mr. Cunningham.

His face was flushed and angry. He grasped his cane with a fierce clutch, and seated himself vigorously beside the table, looking them both sternly in the face.

"So; you have cooked a pretty kettle of fish," he said, with stinging sarcasm. "I thought if there was anybody I could trust it was the captain and mate of the Strongbow. But I'll be hanged if you haven't muddled matters worse than a couple of apprentices."

The two men looked sheepishly at each other.

"But blast it!" cried the captain. "You sent the boy back for the check; so he must have shut your eyes up too."

"And I'll swear if I know how he got on our track and followed us in the boat!" exclaimed the mate.

Mr. Cunningham looked from one to the other in undisguised astonishment.

"What under the sun are you talking about?" he ejaculated. "I sent a boy back for the check?"

"Yes. There is the card you gave him," and the captain pointed to the finely-written card which lay on the table between them.

"Why, you idiot!" cried the enraged visitor, "the little rascal said you had forgotten my directions, and had sent him after me to get them."

"Then I think you were the idiot," replied the choleric captain. "I know it wasn't I that gave him that piece of pasteboard."

"And did you deliver him the check on such a cock-and-bull story?"

"No. He brought a signal which I couldn't doubt."

"Not from me, I'll swear. What was it?"

"It was this, which he said you had given him for a pass-word: 'The Alice Homer has gone to the bottom.'"

Cunningham sprang to his feet with a face inflamed with rage and alarm.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "Where did he learn that name? You have bungled this business sweetly." There was a dark scowl on his face as he looked at them. "And the boy followed you!" he cried suddenly to the mate. "That is another bit of revelation. So you let yourself be tracked, eh? And were followed by this sharp young hound in a boat?"

"It looks devilishly like it," Mr. Hendricks surlily responded.

"And if you two men are not lucky you will get your necks in the hangman's noose yet by your stupid blundering. Two old pirates like you, who think no more of a man's life than a cat's, and yet could not make way with a trussed-up and insensible woman."

"The blazes we couldn't!" cried the mate.

"No. The woman escaped your bungling hands. She is alive and well this minute. And if she don't make New York a hot place for all of us soon it won't be your fault."

"She could not escape!" exclaimed Mr. Hendricks. "I saw her sink like a stone."

"And did not wait to see her rise again like a feather. I tell you this: I saw Alice Homer, or her ghost, maybe, not an hour ago in the Park."

"It can't be so! You are mistaken!"

"There is no such good luck as that," replied Mr. Cunningham. "Why, she knew me as quickly as I knew her. She tried to escape from me. I pursued her through three or four miles of the streets, and then was thrown off the track by the stupidity, or the smartness, I don't know which, of a fat old grocer woman."

The three men looked at each other for several minutes without a word.

"She must be nabbed again," said Mr. Hendricks, at length in a tone of desperation. "I will not fail a second time."

"What good will it do to put her out of the way while that boy is at liberty?" asked Mr. Cunningham. "She is too timid a creature to act with any energy. But I fear that sharp young rascal."

"You needn't then," explained Captain Monroe. "He is under our thumbs at this minute. If he saves himself he will have more reason to boast than he had in saving the woman."

"Under your thumbs?" repeated the visitor, inquiringly.

"Yes. Mr. Hendricks happened to come in and knew him. We nabbed him before he could get away with the check. He has the pleasure of occupying very safe quarters," and the speaker signed with his finger over his shoulder toward the door through which Phil had disappeared.

"You have him in there?"

"Yes. And he won't gnaw himself out in a hurry."

"That is lucky. If the boy escapes our plans are not worth pie-crust. A cold water bath for him is our only safety." And Mr. Cunningham's handsome face grew wicked as he spoke. "Do you think he had any confederates?"

"I think not," replied Mr. Hendricks. "All the indications I have seen point to a single person."

"What were these indications?"

In response the mate described the various circumstances which he had noted implicating Phil in the rescue.

"It is well if it all rests with him," said Mr. Cunningham. "A midnight trip in the boat which I see floating behind your vessel. A fall overboard. A closing of the waves over a rat's head. And a merry pull back.—That is the whole story."

He was as cool and quiet in his tone as if he had been giving orders for a dinner.

The captain and mate looked significantly at each other.

"And what reward are we to have for this new job?" the former asked. "We will make our bargains in advance now."

"Safety," exclaimed Mr. Cunningham, sternly.

"That is reward enough for you. The difference between a dungeon and the deck of the Strongbow.—But let me have the check. A few dollars is a small matter. I will change it to suit your ideas better."

"We have not got it yet," answered the captain, with a change of countenance.

"Where is it?"

"The boy has it."

"Then search him instantly. That is another piece of stupidity. Bring him out here. I want to see him.—Stop!"

"Well?" asked the mate, pausing.

"Do you know that the door is unlocked, and the window is raised! Is this your idea of business?"

With an angry look Cunningham strode across to the cabin window, which he pulled sharply down. Had he been a little less excited and more cautious, he would have looked out of it first, and would have caught a glimpse of a frowzy head just disappearing below the sill. But the spy, whoever he was, escaped discovery.

Captain Monroe locked the cabin door as the mate passed through the portal leading inward to the ship.

He returned, after scarcely a minute's absence, carrying the light form of Phil Hardy.

For the young imp of the wharves was quite incapable of walking, moving, or speaking. His hands and feet were tied so as almost to stop the circulation, and a cloth bound tightly about his mouth effectually hindered speech. Only his eyes were active, and they were as bright and defiant as ever.

The three conspirators looked at him with a curious interest. They seemed to question the possibility that this boy could have outwitted them all. He looked so small and insignificant, and they so large and full of possibilities. Despite Phil's disbelief in the story of the dwarf and the giants he seemed to have exemplified it in his own person.

Cunningham's keen eyes wandered over every detail of the boy's person. Phil's glance caught his and held it for a moment, enchainé. The astute plotter recognized a dangerous foe in the helpless lad.

"Search him," he said, briefly.

This was done, quickly and thoroughly. But, as the reader is aware, there was no trace of the check to be found on his person. The only thing found, separate from the usual cosmopolitan contents of a boy's pockets, was a letter, inclosed in a plain envelope, and directed in a small, elegant handwriting.

"Let me see it," said Cunningham.

"This is lucky," he exclaimed, after a quick look at the envelope.

It was directed to "Mr. Harvey Russell, 879 Madison avenue."

Without a moment's hesitation he tore it open, and perused its contents.

"I am much obliged to our young postman for bringing the letter here, instead of taking it to its destination," he mockingly remarked. "I know where our lady is now, and I think she has sold herself into my hands. It is the old story of the fox and the goose over again.—Try the boy again. He must have the check."

"He has not," they said, after another search.

"But how could he have got rid of it?" asked Cunningham perplexedly, while Phil's eyes burned with triumph. "Take the bandage from his mouth," he sharply continued. "He shall tell us where it is, or it will be worse for him."

The enveloping cloth was removed, and Phil's speech returned to him.

"Now, sirrah," said Mr. Cunningham, severely.

"You must know that you are in our power, and that I would think no more of putting an end to you than I would of treading on a worm.—Where is that check?"

"It's where it will make you wink cross-eyed if you try any of your games on me," said Phil, boldly. "It's in the hands of a friend of mine, and he's bound to bring the perlice on this here ship if I dont turn up afore ten this blessed night."

"That's a lie, boy," exclaimed the captain. "All right. You jist buy it fur a lie, if you're in the market. There'll be more truth then in your pocket than there often is on your tongue."

Mr. Cunningham looked keenly around. "Where was the boy when you gave him this check?" he asked.

"Sitting here. By the window."

"And the window open?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. He has dropped it overboard."

"He put his hand on the sill when he got up," explained the captain.

"That is all right. It will be out at sea before night, instead of in the hands of the police.—Gag him again."

But Phil was not disposed to let this freedom of his tongue pass quite unimproved. He gave vent to one shrill yell for "Help!" that might have been heard the length of the deck, before the bandage could be replaced.

"Lucky that door was closed," said Cunningham, anxiously. "Back with him again. That is your last cry, my boy. At midnight to-night—"

"You will follow the Alice Homer to the bottom," said Hendricks, interrupting.

Phil looked defiance still, though quite unable to speak or move.

These unscrupulous men meant all they said. They cared no more for the life of a street vagabond than they would have valued that of a vagrant dog.

Just at twelve that night, and in a thick darkness, the long, slender boat that rocked at the Strongbow's stern moved stealthily out into the stream, under the silent impulse of two rowers, and with a bound and speechless freight laid near the bow.

They headed straight outward into the swift-flowing current. It was deserted. Not a trace of life could be seen. Not a sound broke the deathly silence.

"This will do," spoke a low voice after ten minutes' rowing. "It is as good as five miles out."

"All right," answered the voice of Captain Monroe. "Take him by shoulders and heels then—and heave."

His words were accompanied by the action. There was a heavy splash, a commotion of the water—and silence. Their freight had disappeared.

In an instant the boat had already drifted away from the dark spot where the helpless victim had sunk.

One impulse from the oars and it was lost in the darkness.

"Ashore! Quick as lightning!" spoke the captain, in low, excited tones.

In fifteen minutes more they had regained the stern of their ship, and the mate had ascended her side, rope in hand.

"What is that?" exclaimed the captain, with a scared utterance, as he slightly stumbled.

"What?" quickly rejoined the mate.

"I stepped on something soft."

"Oh! it's a roll of oakum, that was flung into the boat this morning. Mount up here, quick! We must get to bed."

They did not hear a muttered sound, that came from the bow of the boat, and that seemed to form itself into these words: "Blame your awkward feet! Is them your sea-legs?"

Phil Hardy, their dwarfish foe, had gone to the bottom of the East river, and all his secrets with him. This was all they could think of, and their guilty souls were full of superstitious fear as they hastily retired to the cabin of the ship, not sure but that the spirit of the murdered boy might have preceded them.

CHAPTER XIII.

TRAPPED.

The letter of which Phil had proved such an inefficient postman, and which had fallen into the wrong hands, ran as follows:

310 GLOBE STREET, NEW YORK.

"DEAR HARVEY:—You will be surprised to learn that I am in your city, now, instead of in my old home at Liverpool. How I came here is a long and not very agreeable tale, which I shall have to tell you in person. I have been through the most serious perils, but am safe here now, in the home of some worthy people.

"But I know they are too poor to be burdened with me, and I wish you to devise some means of taking me to my aunt's. You know who I mean, Mrs. Hannah Corson. She lives somewhere above Harlem, I believe.

"Let me hear from you without delay, as I am a little fearful about staying in this part of New York. Please excuse the shortness of this note. It is only a business paper, you see, and my messenger is waiting anxiously for it.

"Don't fail to answer at once, and don't forget that I am still, your true ALICE HOMER."

It may be seen that this letter gave Andrew Cunningham, into whose hands it had fallen, an opportunity to prosecute her schemes which he was not slow to perceive. Alice had put a weapon, which might prove fatal to her, into the hands of her worst enemy.

But all unconscious of this she waited, on the af-

ternoon of her return from the Park, somewhat impatiently for an answer.

Little dreamed any of them into what deadly perils Phil had fallen, and his grandmother was getting quite tried at his ridiculous delay.

"Phil is just at the age when boys get to be perfect nuisances," she said, in a vexed tone. "That's just him. If I send him for a pound of sugar, half the time he will go to the West Indies for it. Or be long enough gone. I must really train that boy some."

She was quite oblivious of the fact that she had for years been training him into these careless habits.

"Oh! never mind, Mrs. Hardy," protested Alice. "It is not really so particular."

"If you had only told him you were in haste," continued the old lady.

"It does not matter at all. It is only the curiosity of an idle woman that ails me. If I do not get an answer until to-morrow it will not matter. I wish you would only put me to work at something."

"I would like to give you something to bring back the color of those white cheeks," said the compassionate old lady. "I do not like to see you looking so."

"Don't mind that, Mrs. Hardy. That is only my fright at the Park. I do not intend to continue looking white. Do let me pare those potatoes for you."

"What? With those delicate hands? No, indeed. You shall do nothing of the sort."

"You do not know what these delicate hands are capable of. I shall scrub off that table at any rate."

There ensued an amusing battle for the possession of the scrubbing-brush, which Alice had seized with a great show of vigor. The old lady conquered, and held it aloft in laughing triumph.

"Catch me letting you do any such thing," she cried.

"Then I only see one thing that remains to do," replied Alice.

"And what is that?"

"For you to get a glass case, and seal me up in it, and stand me in the corner for a parlor ornament."

And a beautiful ornament you would make, my sweet, pale child," said Mrs. Hardy, fondly stroking the face of her guest. "Why, you are as nervous yet!"

"I am afraid I am rather frightened yet. Poor little Susy; she must have thought I was wild.—Now you shall let me do something. That is the only way I can cure my hands of this trembling."

They were interrupted by the appearance of a young man at the open door who inquired for Miss Homer.

"That is my name," said Alice.

"I was directed up here from below," he replied.

"I have a letter for you, miss."

"A letter for me!" she exclaimed, surprised.

"Why, who— But Phil may have delivered mine," she continued to Mrs. Hardy. "He may not have waited for an answer."

She took the letter from the spruce-looking youth who held it, and glanced at the handwriting.

"That will do, sir. Is there an answer?"

"I think there is, miss," he replied.

"Please wait a minute, then, and I will see."

She opened the envelope, and quickly read the letter, her eyes lighting up with satisfaction as she did so.

"He speaks of a carriage. Is it at hand?" she asked.

"Yes, miss. It is just round the corner in the next street."

"Be kind enough to wait outside for a minute. I have something to say privately to this lady," continued Alice, gently closing the door.

"I fear I must leave you, my kind-hearted friend," she said.

"Leave me!" faltered Mrs. Hardy.

"Yes. It was necessary I should not intrude too long upon you. I wrote to a gentleman friend requesting him to take me to the residence of an aunt of mine, who lives just out of New York."

"You have an answer from him?"

"No. He is from home. This is from his sister. She seems to have felt it necessary to open the letter and has sent a carriage for me."

"Are you sure it is from his sister?"

"Oh, yes! There can be no doubt of that."

"It struck me it might be another trick of your enemies.—But then, nobody would get the letter from Phil but the right person. I know that. I suppose it was because the gentleman was not at home that he did not bring the answer himself.—I do wish you had not been so quick, Miss Homer. I do so hate to lose you."

"You must not think that I will forget you," replied Alice, gently. "You have been too kind for that. If I stay in New York you shall often see me."

"Why, you are not going?" cried Susy, breaking in upon them.

"Yes, my dear. A friend of mine has sent his carriage for me."

"But I can't bear to have you go," exclaimed the child, bursting into tears. "I love you so."

"Love at first sight is not always durable," replied Miss Homer, smilingly.

"I don't care! I shall never quit loving you!" cried the sobbing child. "And I don't see why you can't stay."

"There are reasons, my dear," replied Alice, taking the distressed child in her arms. "I cannot stay to be a burden to Mrs. Hardy; for one thing."

"You are not a burden!" exclaimed Mrs. Hardy, energetically.

"I must try not to become one. I shall never forget my two dear friends. And I shall be sure to see

you often. But now I feel that it is necessary that I should go to my aunt's."

"Perhaps it is," responded Mrs. Hardy. "And yet, somehow, I hate to see you going." And the kindly old lady rubbed her eyes fiercely.

"And it may be one of your enemies, too," declared Susy. "You were afraid of them, and you might be going right into their hands."

"Somebody may have robbed Phil of the letter," suggested Mrs. Hardy.

"Why, I thought you were so confident of him just now."

"But he is only a boy," faltered the old lady.

"I am satisfied that he has done his errand properly," replied Alice. "I have here a letter from Miss Russell, which I have no doubt was written by her."

"Let me look at it," plead Susy.

The lady handed it with a smile to the inquisitive child, and turned to bid the old lady good-by.

"Don't forget me!" cried Susy, springing with a bound into her new friend's arms, and warmly kissing and fondling her. "And you must be sure to come and see us very soon."

"Certainly I will," replied Alice, deeply affected by the child's fondness for her. "Meanwhile keep this to remember me."

She slipped a golden locket, with a curiously twisted chain, round the child's neck, and kissed her again as she set her down.

"Now, good-by, dear friends," said Alice, slipping quickly out of the door, as if fearing to be overcome by their evident emotion.

The letter lay on the floor where Susy had thoughtlessly let it fall.

"I am ready now," announced Alice briefly, to the youth who was impatiently waiting. "Is the carriage far?"

"Just around the next corner, miss," he replied, leading the way.

Had she been able to see his face she would certainly have detected something sinister in its expression, innocent of guile as she was.

There was a sneering grimace upon it which indicated a wicked satisfaction in his success. His hand was thrust deep into his pocket as if grasping some substantial reward for his services.

But all that was visible to her was the back of a closely-cropped head, surmounted by a cap set jauntily over on one ear.

"This way, miss," he explained, as they reached the foot of the stairs. "Your street here was a little narrow, and the carriage stopped in the next turn."

In a minute more they had reached the wider street in question.

A stylish coach, drawn by two gray horses, stood waiting there, the driver upon the box. The latter person was not in livery, and was a roughly-dressed native of the Emerald Isle.

He seemed weary of the delay, and called quickly to the youth to open the carriage door, and help the lady in.

"Do you know the directions?" she asked him, somewhat timidly.

"Sartinly, ma'am. It's to Mrs. Corson's that I was told to drive you. She lives out beyant Harlem. I know the place bravely."

"Very well," she replied, reassured by his confident tone.

She stepped into the carriage, the door was closed, the youth mounted beside the driver, and in a minute more they were driving at a brisk pace out the New York streets.

"That's a gay equipage for a livery," said a boy, who had been looking on curiously.

"That's no livery," replied his companion.

"It's just that," rejoined the first speaker. "I don't know the driver, but I bet I could hunt up that young chap aside of him."

"Twigged him afore, hey, Joe Dot?"

"Yes. And he aint none too good. Wonder where they're drivin' that pretty woman to."

"To the Park, like enough," said the other, turning away.

Meanwhile the carriage was moving rapidly out Broadway, and thence out Fifth avenue, along the eastern boundary of the Park, and into the more thinly-settled region beyond.

The drive was a long one, and they seemed to have traveled miles beyond the upper extremity of the Park, when at length they drew up at the gate of a pretentious mansion, that stood back from the thinly built up road, surrounded by a dense clump of trees.

The youth sprang to the ground and opened the gate, permitting the carriage to pass through. It drove slowly up a graveled carriage-way, which wound through thick evergreens, to the front of the house, and drew up at the steps of a long portico.

"Mrs. Corson is not well, miss," said the youth. "Step up this way. You will find her in the parlor at the side."

It was with the first feeling of misgiving which she had experienced during her ride that Alice followed the briskly-moving boy.

He entered the hall, and threw open the door of a side parlor. She stepped in and the portal was quickly closed behind her. Her eyes were lifted, expecting to see the vaguely-remembered form of her aunt. Instead her shrinking gaze fell on the cruelly triumphant face of her mortal foe, Andrew Cunningham.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOME AGAIN.

MRS. HARDY waited long that evening for the return of her precious grandson; but no Phil came.

She was not exactly alarmed. She had too much

confidence in his smartness to deem it possible for any one to get the best of him. And to stay out at night was no new feature of his vagrant life.

Yet for all this she felt uneasy. Some inkling of danger was in the air and affected her so that she could scarcely sleep. Her few short naps were broken by unpleasant dreams, in which Phil got into all sorts of scrapes. He got out of them again, though, which was some mental refreshment to her.

"Here's morning, but where's Phil?" she queried, discontentedly. "I am desperate afraid there's something wrong. And that poor, dear Alice, too! Who knows but she may have been deceived?—I had no business to let her go.—But it's the way with boys and girls. They know so overly much more than their grandmothers."

She kept up this soliloquy as she moved with a heavy heart about her household affairs.

"But how do I know?" she continued. "Phil might be in his bed. That's one thing about my boy. When he comes in at night he don't disturb anybody. That's some of my training."

And with much self-satisfaction at this one good result of her training, she opened the door of Phil's room and looked in.

She shut it again quickly, and with a silent laugh.

"He has stolen a march on me," she said. "That's his sweet young face on the pillow, sure enough. Well, well, I won't disturb him. The poor boy must want sleep. Though if he was only home at respectable hours he could get his sleep at night. I shall have to stop that night-walking."

And the old lady's expression was very resolute.

It was indeed Phil, who had escaped in some strange way from his imminent peril of the night before, and who made his *début* to a late breakfast about nine o'clock.

He was not very satisfactory with his grandmother as to what had detained him.

"Business," was the scope of his revelations. He feared to frighten her too seriously if he told her of his perils.

With Susy he was far more communicative. He had the child's hair almost on end, and her breath coming and going in gasps, as he told the story of his adventure, much as the reader already knows it.

"Now that can't be, Phil," she broke in. "For you to be flung overboard with your hands and feet tied, and left there.—Why you would surely have drowned. Now, what is the use of telling me such stories?"

"It is true enough," he replied. "Cept a little pint which I've left out, and which the capting didn't twig. It was Dirty Dick, and he acted like a man, if he has got an inch of dirt on his face."

"But you have not said Dirty Dick once yet."

"Cause I never jump through a story. That's why. If Dick hadn't been there I'd been among the fishes now. I didn't know afore that Dick was sich a hoss."

"To hear you talk," said Susy, severely, "one might think you were horses and fishes, and pretty near a whole menagerie. Why don't you talk like respectable folks?"

"Cause we're not respect'ble folks," Phil sturdily replied. "And Dick is a hoss—a reg'lar two-forty anmille."

"And how is he a hoss?"

"I'll jist tell you that. I was laying in that boat, as I told you, 'specting every minute would be my next, with the tarnal capting and mate rowin' behind me, and tied as tight as a trussed turkey, and jist on the pint of bein' basted with cold water instead of gravy. That's the identical position I was in, and I tell you I was desp'rat blue, and I was wishin' mighty hard that I was sitting on the top step 'long-side of Susy Lane."

"Oh, hush!" cried Susy, playfully tapping him on the cheek. "I don't know when you will ever get done if you go on at this rate."

"Well, I was layin' there, then, jist like a lump of indigo, when I felt something touch me on the cheek.—I thought it was an eel's tail, it felt so cold like. I was a bit scared, too, and mought have made a noise, only I had a yard of broadcloth around my speaking-trumpet."

"Why don't you say your mouth; if that is what you mean?"

"I dunno. It dont sound dignified like.—Anyhow I soon knowed it was a hand, by the feel. And, what's more, thar come a whisper in my ear to 'keep mum.' The next thing the rope round my hands was cut loose. And then thar come the voice agin. 'Cant reach your feet,' it said. 'I'll giv you the knife. You kin cut loose under water, and swim fur it.' That was every blessed thing, 'cept that I found myself grabbin' the knife. It wasn't three minutes after when they histed me overboard like a bag of spilled pertaters."

Phil paused to give proper effect to the climax, while Susy held her breath in deep suspense.

"Go on!" she cried, testily. "You do beat everything. I'd be sure you went to the bottom, only I know you are here now."

"The water wasn't deep enough to drown Phil Hardy," was his grave response. "You kin bet I weren't three seconds in the water afore I'd cut all loose.—Well, that's all. I had my feet, and my hands, and my mouth, and what more could any reasonable feller want?"

"I think any reasonable fellow would want to get ashore," said Susy.

"Score one for Susy Lane," cried Phil, laughing. "That's jist what I *did* want. It weren't that the East River was wide enough to drown me, but it was so tarnal dark I couldn't see an inch.—I swum around fur fifteen minutes, and I'll swan if I knowed where I was."

"However did you get ashore?" she eagerly asked.

"Dirty Dick agin," was his sententious answer.

"But how did Dick help you?"

"Well you see, I heered a whistle that I knowed as well as I know granny's call to breakfass. I don't b'lieve you, nor nobody, ever heered half so sweet a whistle. I swum fur it straight. And it kept goin' like a forty-planner, and I kept swimmin', and the first thing that come I was agin a wharf and Dick a holdin' down his hand to me. I know you never seed anybody half so glad as Dick and me was."

"I'd jist love Dick! I declare I would!" cried Susy, enthusiastically, "if he would only wash his face."

"That's the one weak pint about Dick," declared Phil, gravely. "You see he heered all their talk through the cabin winder; and he hid in the skiff under the little deck for'ard. It was him chopped my hands loose. And Capting Monroe stepped on him in the boat and thought he was a bunch of oakum. And then he went down the wharves and whistled for me. And—that's all."

"You talk jist as if it was nothing."

"It aint much," remarked Phil, indifferently.

"How's Miss Alice this mornin'? Aint seen her yet?"

"Why, didn't you know that she had left? Gone to her aunt's in the country?"

"The thunder she has!" exclaimed Phil, springing to his feet in his surprise.

"Yes, when she got the letter yesterday—"

"Letter from who?" sharply interrupted Phil.

"Why, in answer to the one that you took."

"Hello! There's a wheel loose now sure," and Phil gave vent to a shrill whistle. "And she got a letter?"

"Yes. It's here. She dropped it." And the frightened child led the way to Mrs. Hardy's rooms, and gave him the letter which had been picked up on the floor.

Phil unceremoniously read it aloud, for the benefit of the audience. It was without date or address, and read as follows:

"MY DEAR MISS HOMER:

"Your letter is received; and as my brother is out of town, and I do not know just where to reach him, I deemed it my duty to open it, and I am glad that I did so, as I can serve you as well as Harvey could have done. I know Mrs. Corson's residence, just out of Harlem, and take pleasure in sending our carriage to take you there. You can trust yourself safely to the bearer. I would have come myself, but am not able to just at present. However, I promise myself the pleasure of soon calling on you, and will notify Harvey of your being here as soon as I know where to address him."

"Yours affectionately,

"MARY RUSSELL."

"That's gay," said Phil, sarcastically. "And she went on *that*?"

"Why, certainly," answered his grandmother.

"Then there's blazes loose, sure enough. Jist smell that paper."

They did so, and found that it exhaled a faint perfume.

"That's Cunningham's scent," remarked Phil.

"And who is Cunningham?"

"He's the sweet-scented chap that's puttin' up these jobs on Miss Alice."

"And you think he wrote that letter?" asked Mrs. Hardy, breathlessly.

"I know he did."

"How?"

"Cause it aint no woman's handwritin' nor paper. It's only a man tryin' to come the woman. Next, there's that nasty sweet smell. And then agin, jist notice the compersation. 'Our kerridge!' Now what woman would have said 'our kerridge?' It would have been 'my kerridge,' sure."

Susy boxed his ears for his impudence, but his grandmother was too full of concern to pay heed to this.

"Did you not deliver the letter?" she asked, sternly.

"I had it stole from me by Cunningham," said Phil, speaking fast, as if trying to drown any reproaches. "It's that chap that's nabbed Miss Alice. And it's this chap that's goin' to fetch her back. What kind of a lookin' feller was it come fur her?"

"A tall young man," replied Mrs. Hardy, with a look of great distress. "He was polite and honest-looking. Can't be possible—"

"He could afford to look honest, blame his ugly picture!" Phil savagely interrupted. "Did the kerridge come up to the door?"

"No. It stood jist round the corner of the street."

"Maybe some of the boys seen it then. I'm goin' fur them."

Phil made a plunge for the door. He was stopped by a distressed call from Susy.

"Are you sure you can bring Miss Alice back?" she asked, plaintively, her eyes full of tears.

"I kin try mighty hard."

"But do you know where she is?"

"The letter says, above Harlem."

"Maybe that is not true."

"Yes it is," said Phil, positively. "You see, the chap didn't dream that Miss Alice was goin' to drop the letter fur us to pick up. And he had to tell her somethin' about where her aunty lived."

"But he might take her somewhere else."

"Dont b'lieve he will. She mought s'pect, and make a noise, you see."

"Had you not best get the pollee, Phil?" asked Mrs. Hardy, falteringly.

"The pollee be blowed!" was Phil's contemptuous answer. "Dont want to knock down plums fur them to pick up. Good-by, granny and Susy. Bet I bring her back!"

He kissed them both affectionately, and then ran from the house with a boy's enthusiasm, flinging his hat before him down the stairs.

"Hallo! Joe," was his first exclamation outside. "How goes the jiants, hey? Were you round here last night?"

"Guess so," Joe Dot replied.

"Spose you seen nothin' of a fancy kerridge that stopped hereaway?"

"I seed it," answered Joe, sententiously.

"That's clever. What kind of a lookin' team was it?"

"A pair of spanking fine grays, and a big, handsome coach, with a monogram on the door."

"A monogram? What's a monogram?"

"Oh! it's two or three letters of a man's name, tied up in a bow-knot, which it would take a school-master to untie. That's it."

"Oh!" groaned Phil. "Did you know the team?"

"Like a book. It come from Harry Pierce's stable in the Bowery. I bet on that."

"A young lady went off in it?"

"Yes, the beautifullest lady. I know the chap that put her in the carriage."

"Ha!" said Phil. "Who was he?"

"A tall, conceited feller, that's past being a boy, and aint got to be a man yet. He's a little touch cross-eyed, his nose is sharp enough to use as a plow, and his mouth might do for a railroad depot. And his head's shingled so close that it's got more hide than hair on it. That's his photograph."

"You have seen him before?"

"Yes. About Pierce's stable."

"Come down that way with me, Joe. I want you to show me that team."

Nothing loth, Joe accompanied Phil, questioning him closely about his object, and receiving very unsatisfactory answers. The two boys lounged into the stable, and Joe was able to soon point out the horses, a pair of fine grays, who were quietly munching their oats.

"That's the man that drove," he said, pointing to an Irishman standing near them.

Phil at once accosted him.

"Fine team that," he remarked.

"Taint asy beat," said the man.

"Dont look as if they'd been away from their oats lately."

"Indade and they have then. They weren't far short of twenty mile yisterday."

"Which way?" asked Phil, carelessly.

"A bit out of Harlem."

"Ah!" said Phil, easily. "Good goers, I spose."

"They're jist divils at goin'."

"I've been above Harlem. Whose place did you drive to?"

"Not much do I know. Had a chap along that knowed. It's about a mile out, on the river road. An old-fashioned place, with trees a-plenty."

Phil continued to question, in his off-handed manner, but he knew now about all that the driver knew. He felt, however, that he had gained some very important knowledge.

CHAPTER XV.

PHIL'S NEW CONFEDERATE.

PHIL HARDY was not yet ready to make his search for the house of the abductors. He believed in leaving no loophole open behind him, and there were two or three matters which it was necessary to have attended to.

One of these was settled by hunting up Dirty Dick and placing him on guard duty over the Strong-bow. There was no telling to what extent the two villainous officers might take part in Cunningham's plans, and it seemed best to have them watched.

There were signals concocted between the two boys, by which they could communicate with each other if desirable.

Joe Dot was let into a portion of the secret, and similarly placed to watch Tim Fagan. Phil considering him another dubious element in the combination.

"Dont b'lieve he kin find any more sich blamed rascals in York," said Phil. "If anything's to be done one of these chaps has got to do it. That's why I want them shadder'd."

For his own part he had still another object in view. He made the best of his way to 879 Madison avenue, and boldly rung the bell of a stylish mansion which he found in that locality.

A servant quickly appeared, who looked down with infinite disdain on Phil's dilapidated garb.

"Is this where Mr. Harvey Russell hangs out?" asked Phil, unabashed by the magnificence of the man.

"He dont hang out anywhere," was the curt reply.

"Does he live here, then? Maybe that'll suit your ideas better."

"What do you want?" the man shortly demanded. "I've got no time to waste on ragamuffins."

"What do I want, eh?" asked Phil.

"Yes."

"I want a straight answer. And I want none of your slack. Them's two things. Now shell out, Josiah. Does Mr. Russell live here?"

"He dont want to see the likes of you," said the man, angrily, stepping back to shut the door.

"Hold your horses there," cried Phil, advancing his foot to keep the door from closing. "Look here, you over-fed minion, if you dont tell Mr. Russell there's a gentleman waiting here to see him, on important bizness, and if you dont jump livelier than a grasshopper why jist look out fur squalls, that's all. —Now git!"

The man swelled with rage, and looked as if on the point of taking Phil by the collar and shaking the impudence out of him.

"You rascally young vagrant!" he cried, fiercely. "Leave here now, or I'll give you up to a policeman."

"Try it on, Josiah!" said Phil, aggravatingly. "I like to be gup up to policemen, I do. And you'd best call Mr. Russell in the wink of a cat's tail, or there'll be lively times around these diggin's."

"Who is there?" called a voice from the interior of the house.

The man, who had been swelling again, wilted down suddenly.

"It is a ragged and impudent little street vagabond," was the reply.

"What does he want?"

"Want to see you," answered Phil, pushing into the hall. "Been tryin' to beat that into this full-grown potato-bug for ten minutes; but 'tain't no go. His hides too thick."

"Why did you not bring the boy in?" asked Mr. Russell, with a concealed smile. "I do not wish you to decide what visitors I am to receive. Come in, sir."

Phil entered with an aggravating wink at his antagonist, which was as much as the nerves of that individual could bear.

Mr. Russell stood back in the hall, newspaper in hand. Phil looked at him curiously as he advanced. He set him down mentally as a very good-looking and well-dressed young man, with a look of kindness about him that pleased the boy's observant eyes.

"Wonder if him and Miss Alice is sweet?" thought Phil. "I've a notion that they'd jist match."

The gentleman u hered his visitor into the library room, and helped him to a seat. But Phil felt much like a fish out of water as he looked at the grandeur of his surroundings, the white busts, the bronze clock, and the cases full of richly-bound books.

"What can I do for you?" asked Mr. Russell, amused at Phil's manner.

"You kin jist hold on till I git the pints of the compass," Phil replied. "Aint takin' this thing in every day. Wasn't brung up to style."

"You are quite welcome to any enjoyment you can get from it."

"I allers did like statues, and gold-laced books, and picters, and sich," announced Phil. "And they dont grow none too much down our way.—Howsomever, there's a little girl there, I'm kinder soft on, that's as pretty as a picter and as good as a book. And I like her better than a dozen statues."

"Ah! your sweetheart, is it?"

"Sartainly," replied Phil, as simply as if he considered the having a sweetheart a prime necessity of life.

"What is her name?"

"It's Susy Lane."

"Quite a pretty name," said the gentleman, in a kindly manner. "And now suppose we come to business. What is it you wish to see me about?"

"I spose you know a young lady, whose name's Miss Alise Homer?"

Mr. Russell started violently at this opening of Phil's business.

"What do you mean?" he cried, excitedly. "Where did you learn that name? You can know nothing of the lady."

"Dont you be-a-putting that notion in your pipe."

"You cannot. She is in Liverpool."

"Then her part of Liverpool's in New York."

"Miss Homer in New York! Where is she—how did she come?—Can it be possible?" And his face flushed red as he spoke.

"I'm comin' to that," answered Phil. "Aint you got a sister, whose name's Mary?"

"I have," he said in surprise.

"Know her handwriting?"

"I think so."

"Jist put your eyes on that there, and tell me if she writ it."

He handed Mr. Russell the letter which Alice had received. The astonished gentleman read it with dilated eyes and quick-coming breath.

"It is a forgery!" he cried. "It has no resemblance to her handwriting!—And addressed to Miss Homer?"

"Exactly."

"What does all this mean?" Mr. Russell vehemently exclaimed. "I cannot understand her being in America.—And this letter—"

"Any chaps in New York that's down on her?"

"I do not know of any."

"Maybe you know a chap whose name's Cunningham? And a mighty cunning feller, too."

"Ha!" ejaculated Mr. Russell. "He is a first-cousin of Miss Homer's."

"Dunno nothin' 'bout that," answered Phil. "But he's a thunderin' rogue. And I know this much, it was him that stole Miss Alice out of Liverpool and brung her here. And then he tried to drown her. And then he tried to drown me cause I fished her out of the East River. And now he's stole her agin and run off with her, and I'm jist out on the hunt."

Mr. Russell seemed thunderstruck at this concise narrative. His excitement had become agitation. He trembled, and grew red and pale by turns, as he began to realize the extent of the villainy which had been practiced.

"Tell me the whole story!" he exclaimed, starting to his feet, and rapidly walking the library floor. "If this is true we must act at once!"

"Spose I dont know that?" asked Phil shortly.

"That's what I'm here for."

He proceeded to give Mr. Russell a detailed account of the striking events of which the reader is already aware. The gentleman's excitable nature was deeply stirred. He could scarcely control his indignation as Phil recounted the dastardly attempt at murder.

"Why did you not inform the police?"

"Cause I aint got no notion of them.—And they wouldn't believe me, neither."

"They will believe me, then.—I am quite sure I know where this house you speak of is situated. I shall have it searched at once."

"Dont you do it!" said Phil, positively.

"And why not?"

"Cause, Cunningham is too sharp fur your perlice, that's why. If he catches the shine of a brass star 'bout there, he'll git rid of the woman, somehow. You bet on that."

"That is nonsense, boy. We must have aid."

"What help do we want? A fox and a lion is worth a whole flock of sheep. I'm goin' to be fox. And I want you to be lion when the time comes."

"The time must come soon!" cried Mr. Russell, fiercely. "Alice in such deadly danger! I cannot bear to think of it. Come, boy, at once! We must not lose a minute."

"Taint minutes that's the question," replied Phil, coolly. "If a feller thinks 'bout minutes he'll make headway too fast. You're too hot, Mr. Russell. A chap's got to be jist as cool as ice cream fur a job like this."

"It is hard to be cool—"

"When the gal you're sweet on is in trouble, I know that," averred Phil, nodding his head sagaciously. "I kin 'preciate your feelin's, 'cause I'm sweet on Susy myself.—But I want you to know that I'm captin' of this job, and I'm goin' to put it through my own way."

"Very well," replied Mr. Russell, with a sickly effort at a smile. "Shall I order the carriage?"

"Spose you might," returned Phil, reflectively.

"We kin put it up in Harlem. Wont do to fetch it too close."

In a short time afterward Phil found himself lying back luxuriously on the crimson cushions of an elegant barouche, enjoying himself hugely as people turned to look at the strange contrast between him and his companion.

"This is scumtious," remarked Phil. "Bet folks think I'm a foreign lord that you're showin' the place to. Couldn't stare wuss if I was Queen Victoria."

Mr. Russell drove straight to the police-head-quarters. He had a will of his own, and was not one to yield to Phil's dictation.

He was closeted with the chief for half an hour before he again appeared.

"Aint goin' to take in no peelers, are you?" asked Phil, excitedly. "Cause if you are I'll git out."

"No," said Mr. Russell, quietly. "I have been informing the authorities of what you have told me. We will go ahead and reconnoiter."

In an hour or so afterward they were gradually approaching the house to which Alice had been taken. Cunningham's plans had failed in several important particulars. In Phil's escape from drowning. In his getting the forged letter. In his knowledge of Mr. Russell.—The villain could scarcely have conjectured how the safety of his plot was being imperiled.

Mr. Russell seemed a little doubtful of the exact position of the house of which they were in search. They examined each place carefully as they proceeded.

"Hold hard!" cried Phil, at length, in a guarded voice. "I twig a face that looks familiar like. You hang back here while I go up and buzz him a bit."

A short distance ahead of them stood a square stone mansion, deeply embowered in trees. At the gateway opening on the road was a tall, loose-jointed boy, leaning with his two elbows on the gate.

It was he that had attracted Phil's attention. Hastily taking off his coat and throwing it over his arm, setting his hat back in a countrified fashion, and wiping his face profusely with his handkerchief, Phil advanced until opposite the boy; then paused as if tired and looked up at the youth.

"Hallo!" he said. "Nice kind of day."

"I dont know that I said it wasn't," drawled the youth.

"This your place?" Phil innocently questioned.

"Maybe you'd like to see the deeds for it?"

"No. Not as long as you say so. It's a mighty pretty, shady sort of place."

"You ought to see the garden. Then you might talk," said the youth, removing his elbows from the gate.

"Well, I dunno as I've anything agin it," remarked Phil, opening the gate and walking in as if he had received a formal invitation. "Tote a chap round to your garding then, and let's see the posies. I'm kinder fond of posies."

"Jolly green, he is!" the youth mentally remarked. "Come ahead then, boss; I'll open your eyes."

Phil was not slow in accepting this invitation. He followed his guide through the grounds, with eyes wide with wonder and delight at the beauties which the latter pointed out.

The youth was thrown off his guard by Phil's simple manner too much to observe that his new friend inspected the house much more closely than he did the flowers, noting every door and window with quick but keen glances.

They were interrupted in their amusement by the sharp lifting of a sash, and the tone of an impatient voice.

"Will!" it sternly called.

The youth hastened to respond.

"What boy is that you have there?"

"A friend of mine," replied Will, with a ready lie.

"He wanted to see the garden."

Phil's head was turned away, and he was very earnestly inspecting a rose.

"Take him out of here instantly, or he may be kicked out, and you after him."

The window was lowered with a slam. The two boys twisted their faces at each other in a most ex-

pressive manner. But Phil took good care to keep his features turned aside as he followed his guide to the gate.

He had recognized the voice as that of Cunningham. But he was not aware that the latter had seen and known his face before opening the window, and was now remarking, with a very dark look:

"It is that boy! There can be no mistake about it! The young hound is dangerously sharp. How under heaven he has escaped from Hendricks and Monroe is too much for me to guess. And he has smelt out my retreat already, and humbugged Will at sight. As I live, I am getting afraid of the youngster. He must and shall be put out of the way."

He walked the floor nervously for several minutes, in deep thought.

"The boy is not alone in his knowledge," he continued. "This house may be already watched by the police. I must get rid of my female by hook or crook to-night.—And of the boy, too, I think. He will be back here, on some burglarious scheme, before the night is old. If he is I will shoot him as I would a troublesome cat."

Meanwhile Phil was saying to Mr. Russell:

"Got him! He's there himself. And the lady too. There's fancy bars to her winder. I'm goin' to git her out of that shanty to-night, or explode."

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE TOILS.

We must return to Alice Homer, whom we left just ushered into the presence of her direst foe. Her soul sunk within her as she encountered his cold, searching eyes and the mocking triumph of his face.

"I am glad to see you," he said, with an expression of politeness.

She made no answer, but sunk into a chair, faint at heart to learn how basely she had been deceived.

"Mrs. Carson is not at home," he continued.

"But I shall be happy to do the honors of her house in her absence."

"Is this Mrs. Carson's house?" asked Alice, with a quick hope of relief.

"Oh! certainly! It was there you wanted to come, was it not? I am sorry that aunt Hannah will be away from home for a day or two.—But I shall try and entertain you."

"You!" she gasped, fixing on him her eyes wide with fright.

"Yes," he replied, with one of his little sneering laughs. "I shall see that you are well cared for."

"Why have you brought me here?" cried Alice, with a sudden outburst of indignation. "It was the basest, the cruellest of lies, by which you deceived me."

"By using the name of your lover, Harvey Russell, in vain?" he mockingly asked.

"By lying; by forging; by every base act!" she indignantly exclaimed. "You cannot annoy me by speaking of Harvey Russell as my lover. I do love him, as much as you force me to despise you."

"Now, my dear Alice, you are getting hotter than the occasion calls for," he quietly replied. "It is never advisable to lose your temper about trifles."

He stood with an elbow on the mantle, his fingers toying idly with his watch-chain, his cold eyes steadily fixed upon her changeable face.

"Why have you brought me here?" she again demanded, with a frightened glance round. "You have already tried to murder me. Is it to repeat your effort?"

Indignation struggled with the deep dread in her voice. She rose from her seat and stood with a trembling hand on the back of the chair, looking up at her foe.

"There, child, you do talk so unpleasantly," he replied, with a shrug. "You have got some ridiculous fancy in your head. Why, it is five years since I last saw you."

"Except this afternoon, at the Park, when you followed me for miles through the streets!" was her indignant outburst.

"I don't know to what you refer," he coldly replied. "Your imagination is at work, Alice."

"Miss Homer, if you please," she quickly responded. "Is it your object to hold me as a prisoner here?"

"A prisoner? Now that is another of your idle fancies. Of course you are free."

"Then I shall go," she briefly said.

The folding doors of the parlor were at her right hand. With a quick, bird-like movement, she caught the knob and flung the door wide open, darting out into the hall.

He followed with some deliberation. She had already reached the front door, and was striving eagerly to open it.

"I am afraid somebody has turned the key in that," he quietly said. "I hope you will not break my poor lock."

She turned and gazed with frightened eyes down the hall. His hated form filled the passage, and hindered flight in that direction. She stood at bay, like a startled fawn.

"One would think, Miss Homer," he continued, "that I was trying to detain you against your will."

"So you are, sir!" she replied, his tone filling her soul with fierce indignation. "Open this door instantly, or I shall call for help."

"Why, you may call if you wish to exercise your voice," was the mocking answer. "I fear there would be no other result. We are a little isolated here, and voices do not carry far through these thick stone walls."

"Why do you persecute me?" was her appealing demand. "Is it my money? You are welcome to it."

all. Only let me go! Only cease your efforts to destroy me!"

"I am sorry to find," he responded, "that you are still clinging on that string. I do not understand what has given you such a ridiculous notion."

"Shall I tell you?" she cried, standing upright and confronting him. "It is because I see your hand at work in all my persecutions. It was your agents, at Liverpool, who wrote me a lying letter, and decoyed me on board that dreadful ship. It was your agents who imprisoned me during a long ocean voyage. It was your agents that drugged me into insensibility, and that sought to drown me. And they would have succeeded, only for—"

She paused irresolutely, turning somewhat pale.

"Well? Only for what?"

"I will not betray my rescuer into your hands. He too may be murdered."

A hard smile passed over his face as he answered: "I know him. So you need not be so careful. I fancy that he will not do much more rescuing."

"Why! Have you already murdered him?" she asked, with a scared look.

"Well, if you are not the most unpleasant woman I have ever talked with," he answered, shrugging his shoulders. "Your brain must be a little wrong on the subject of putting people out of the way. Reassure yourself. I have not the most remote intention of doing any murdering, as you so bluntly term it."

"And what more polite term have you for your effort to take my life?" she sarcastically asked.

"There is enough of this," he sternly replied. "My patience is not all enduring, Alice Homer."

"Let me go!" she cried, nervously turning the latch. "I will say no more. I will never speak of you again. Only let me go!"

"You shall go—but it shall be where I will," he replied, striding toward her and seizing her wrist in his strong gripe.

She struggled a moment ineffectually, her face flushed with anger. Then she suddenly grew pale and tottered backward. She would have fallen but that he caught her. The scene through which she had passed had been too much for her powers of endurance. She had fainted.

"Drooped lucky," he grimly said. "It will put an end to a scene that I was getting tired of. Now to dispose of her before she comes to."

He proceeded to the rear of the house on the second floor. Here was a room whose windows had been lightly but effectually barred against any strength that she could display. The sash were drawn down a few inches at the top for ventilation, but otherwise they were tightly fastened.

"This will make a good nest for my bird," he soliloquized, as he laid her slender form on a lounge. "I will leave her there to come to; and if she never comes to, so much the better."

He stood looking down on her with a very dark expression, his hand involuntarily stealing toward an inner pocket of his vest.

"If I dared," he muttered, "She must be disposed of. I could do it safely now. But then there remains the body; that inconvenient result. And I have not the heart to do it. I must give it to those brutes on the Strongbow. And then, if they should be discovered, they have nothing stronger than their word to connect me with it. It is the safer plan."

He was fumbling about her pockets as he spoke these last words.

"I'll swear if she hasn't got rid of that letter!" he ejaculated. "That is bad. But she may have dropped it in the carriage."

Locking the door behind him he hastened downstairs, leaving Alice plunged in a deep insensibility. She lay thus for hours, her lifelessness gradually passing into a more natural sleep.

It was late night when she awoke. The room was in utter darkness. It was some time before she could gain a realizing sense of her situation. But gradually the whole horror of the position in which she was came upon her. Her pulse throbbed with bitter pain. A fear of the darkness mingled with the deep dread of her enemy. In uncontrollable terror she sprang up and ran madly across the room, beating with all her strength on the door she encountered.

It was all in vain. There was no response. There was no reply to the wild call for aid which she sent ringing through the house. A deathly stillness ruled over all, and failed to yield to her wild appeal.

"My God! what will become of me?" moaned Alice, feebly, as she staggered and fell prone upon the floor.

She was too weak to rise, and lay in hopeless misery for what seemed hours, her senses gradually yielding to that blessed boon of sleep, which brings relief to so many weary souls.

Day had dawned when she again recovered consciousness. It was a long and miserable day, its monotony only broken by the appearance with her meals of the boy whom she recognized as the agent of her abductor.

But she had no wish to eat, and left her food untasted. Out of the two windows of the room could be seen a garden beautiful with flowers and foliage. At a happier time she would have been charmed with it. Now she hardly gave it a glance.

At the supper-hour hunger overcame her listlessness. She ate sparingly of the food brought her, and drank a deep draught of the refreshing tea.

She little thought how incautious she had been till she found her senses departing despite her utmost efforts to retain consciousness.

The beverage had been strongly drugged, and she was becoming irresistibly overcome by the same narcotic which had before locked her senses in oblivion.

Darkness had long fallen when the door of her

room was cautiously opened and Cunningham entered.

"It has worked," he said, triumphantly, as he saw a slight form stretched prone and motionless on the floor.

Hastily calling down the stairs the boy Will appeared.

"Is the carriage ready?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"All right. That will do."

As Will retired Mr. Cunningham quickly enveloped Alice's insensible frame in a dark cloth, and lifted and bore her hastily down-stairs.

Five minutes afterward the sound of wheels denoted the rapid departure of a carriage.

"Now for the spy," said Cunningham, with an air of deep satisfaction, as he returned to the house. "If I can shoot the young hound as a burglar it will be a glorious riddance."

It was an hour afterward when the light figure of Phil Hardy cautiously approached the house from the garden, followed at a distance by Mr. Russell.

"I don't quite like the looks of things," said Phil, dubiously. "Let me work up a little closer."

At that instant a shrill whistle, three times repeated, sounded from the direction of the road.

"Dirty Dick's signal, by all that's blue!" cried Phil. "Down with you, and crawl out lively!"

Phil's fall to his hands and knees was not an instant too soon, for the same moment a pistol-shot resounded, and a ball swept past the space which he had just occupied.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DOUBLE CHASE.

PHIL HARDY'S fall had been so nearly simultaneous with the report of the pistol, that it was natural to suppose that he had been shot and had fallen in consequence.

Such was Cunningham's idea, and he stood looking with great satisfaction at the dark spot in which he fancied that he could trace the outlines of the fallen boy.

"Not bad for an after dark aim," he said. "I think that boy is out of my way. The little rogue would have put me to a deuced lot of trouble if I hadn't settled him.—The ball must have hit him hard. There was not a cry, nor a groan even."

So speaking, with as much unconcern of manner as if he had simply killed a wasp, he left the house and walked out toward the dark spot in the shrubbery which he imagined to be Phil's body.

To his amazement it proved to be only the shadow of a bush. There was no Phil there.

"I'll swear if that isn't odd!" he muttered, looking eagerly around with the idea that the boy might have been wounded and have crept a short distance away.

But look as he would he could find no trace of the boy.

He lit a match and flashed its light on the surrounding sward. There was no sign of blood.

"Can it be possible that he has escaped again?" he asked himself. "It looks like it. The boy must have a charmed life."

At this moment the boy, Will, appeared, with an excited look.

"I heard a pistol go off, sir," he explained.

"Yes. I shot at a burglar," replied Cunningham, speaking rapidly. "Go to the house and stir up Harry. The two of you search the grounds. He must be hid somewhere in the bushes."

Their search was destined to prove unsuccessful. Phil and his companion were already outside the grounds, and were proceeding rapidly in the direction of the signal they had heard.

"There's something mighty queer 'bout that bullet," said Phil, reflectively. "If I hadn't just slid down I'd been toppled over like a stray pigeon. What's your notion 'bout it, Mr. Russell?"

"I think," was the quiet reply, "that Cunningham knew you this afternoon, and has been on the watch. He may have expected our return to-night."

"He might, that's a fact," answered Phil reflectively. "It was a natter squeak, anyhow. That's twice I've got away by a half-inch. The third time's got to come. Hope I'll only have the same luck."

"I hope you will.—But where are you going now?" "After the little chap that whistled. Dirty Dick we call him.—Just wait. I'll stir him up agin."

Phil whistled, making the same signal they had heard; but in a much lower tone.

It was answered from the road, just before them.

A few steps more brought them in sight of a slender figure by the roadside.

"Dick!" cried Phil, cautiously.

"It's that idle, d-d person," answered the boy. "Glad you heered me. I've been goin' along here whistlin' for a good while. Didn't know which was the house."

"And what's up now?" Phil shortly asked. "Struck any trail?"

"Guess so. Who's that with you?"

"It is Mr. Russell, Miss Homer's friend."

"All right. You didn't go through the house?"

"No, nor can't now. They're on the look-out. I come mighty near gettin' ventilated with a pistol bullet."

"Heard the shot. Thought somebody had got wakened up," said Dick, as coolly as if he lived in an atmosphere of bullets. "Well, there aint no use goin' through the house now."

"What's the reason then aint?" asked Phil, in his quick tone.

"Cause the woman's not there. She's took down the river agin."

"Down the river!" cried Mr. Russell, with a quick gasp.

"Yes, I seed it myself."

"And you're terrible long-winded in telling it,"

growled Phil. "We're wastin' minutes, and we aint got none to spare. Who was it took her? And how was it done?"

"It was the captain of the Strongbow. He went up stream jist after dark, with two sailors to row. I follered in Joe Brown's skiff. Kept him in sight till he landed, a piece above here. Then I come ashore below, and scouted round."

"An' what did you learn?" asked Mr. Russell, excitedly.

"'Bout half an hour ago a carriage come dashin' down the shore. It dropped anchor jist at the boat. Then they took out of it somethin' that I knowed was a woman, from the size and shape. But she was all wrapped up, so that you couldn't see a sign of her from head to toe."

"Then you might be mistaken," suggested Mr. Russell.

"Mistaken be blowed!" returned Dick, with a sniff of contempt. "Phil and me dont git mistaken. Spose you reckernise this as wimmen's fixins?"

He drew a vail from his pocket.

"Yes," replied Mr. Russell.

"Looks like the one Miss Alice had on," said Phil.

"Well, I found that where they took her out of the carriage. I'm dead sure of that."

"We must be alive!" cried Phil, with a sudden energy. "Every minute counts. Sure it was the captin?"

"Yes, and two sailors."

"Then she's all right yit. The captin's a timer—some feller alongside that mate. And he wont venture to dip her under afore them sailors."

"What are we to do?" asked Mr. Russell, yielding Phil the leadership.

"Go fer them like ten thousand bricks!" exclaimed Phil, with great energy. "You take the skiff, Dick, and pull hard down the river. That is if you aint played out now."

"Nary a bit," said Dick, vigorously.

"Fetch up about the Strongbow, and keep your eyes and ears open. Mr. Russell and me will take the kerridge and drive in. Strike out lively, Dick. There aint a minute to be lost."

With few words more they separated, Dick going to his boat, and Mr. Russell and Phil hurrying to the stable at which their carriage had been put up.

Their drive back to New York was a rapid one. Through the streets they dashed, the wheels rattling noisily in the still night. It would have been a dangerous progress by daylight, but now the avenues were nearly deserted. Policemen stirred on their posts and seemed half inclined to stop the fast driving of our friends. But it was a warm night, and the exertion might have been considerable.

So there was no drawback on Mr. Russell's furious driving, and in a remarkably short space of time they were near the East River wharves, and in the vicinity of the Strongbow.

It was necessary now to take a different mode of procedure. Putting up the carriage at a hotel, which was fortunately found open, they hastened to the wharf.

It was now past midnight. The night was well lighted, however, by a moon which had lately risen, and which threw a flood of silvery radiance over stream and city, beautifully bringing out the spars, and net-like tracery of ropes, which lay defined against the starlit sky.

"That is our ship," said Phil, cautiously pointing to the Strongbow, which now, fully unloaded, rose high out of the water. "She looks to be fast asleep. I dont see a live thing the size of a mouse on her deck."

"Can they have arrived yet with the boat?" asked Mr. Russell.

"They've had time enough," replied Phil, confidently. "Jist you rest here, agin the post. I'll scout round and see."

The small figure of the boy became almost imperceptible, as he passed in a stooping attitude along the pier, in the shadow of the ship's hull.

Mr. Russell stood partly concealed by the post, and waited impatiently for his return.

The observant eyes next saw Phil on the deck, moving with excessive caution, and pausing, as if to listen, at the cabin-door.

He was obliged to suddenly crouch down, in the shadow of a coil of ropes, as this door opened, and a tall, dark-bearded man stepped on deck.

"I fancied I heard a noise," he remarked to some one below, "but it must have been a rat. There is nothing here except moonlight. There is a confounded sight too much of that."

"To-night wont do," spoke a voice from below, which Phil recognized as that of Captain Monroe.

"Nor to-morrow night either if the moon keeps so cursed bright," returned the mate. "We can safely go to our beds and sleep the sleep of the virtuous."

There was a slight laugh from below as he retired, closing the door behind him.

Mr. Russell had seen this movement, but had not heard the low-spoken words. He waited quietly for Phil's return.

"All correct," said the latter, rising suddenly beside him. "The gal's aboard. Miss Homer, I mean. It comes kind of nat'ral to say gal, sometimes."

"Are you sure?"

"Sartin.—And, what's more, we're all sound fur to-night. We kin go home and snooze in our virtuous beds, as Mate Hendricks says."

"You overheard them then?" Mr. Russell eagerly asked.

"What else was I thar for, I'd like to know? Why I've got ears like gimlets, and kin screw them into any man's bizness."

Phil proceeded to relate what had passed, to the intense interest of his auditor.

"No use keepin' out of bed and losing our sleep,"

he concluded. "We've got to be wide awake to-morrow, you bet. You kin strike fur your perlices as early in the mornin' as you like. Reckon we'll want help."

"Where is the boy, Dick?"

"Can't be fur off now," answered Phil, looking up-stream. "You kin slide. I'll wait fur Dick and post him. Guess he's makin' the water bile somewhere yonder."

"Good-night then; and be cautious," enjoined Mr. Russell.

"You post your bottom dollar on that," replied Phil. "When I git a good hand I dont waste my trumps."

Mr. Russell departed, leaving Phil on the watch. In ten minutes more his quick eyes discerned the boat of Dirty Dick, moving rapidly down with the current.

Phil gave a preconcerted signal, and very soon Dick was ashore and had joined him. Then Phil treated his friend to a synopsis of the situation, as they proceeded together in search of that slumber which both needed.

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. HARDY'S CALLER.

THE two boys rose betimes the next morning, Phil taking care that Dick's face should have a sound scrubbing in cold water.

"It's comin', Dick," he said, eying him critically. "You're gettin' down to the nat'ral skin agin. If I only had you in hand for 'bout six weeks, with plenty of sandpaper.—Dont be afeard of the soap. It wont hurt you."

"If a feller swallows a pint of soap suds it aint so nice," replied Dick, sputtering. "I wish you'd git out. You make me nervous talkin'."

With a laugh Phil left the room, Dick continuing his ablutions with unwonted energy. Mrs. Hardy was bustling about the outer room, as busy as a bee in the season of flowers.

"So you are home again," she said, discontentedly. "I am getting so that I dont look for you before morning. You are having too much night business, Phil."

"Now dont scold, granny," returned the boy, kissing her affectionately. "Dont 'spect to have much more of it. I'm after Miss Alice, hotfoot."

"And is there any hope?" she eagerly asked. "Have you discovered anything?"

"You bet high on that! I've found the nest that the bird was in. That's somethin'. The nest's empty now, but I know where the bird has flew to. That's somethin' more."

"You're growing to be a terrible smart fellow," said Mrs. Hardy, looking proudly upon the boy. "You're going to be just like your father. He was terrible smart too."

"And like my granny," replied Phil. "And she's just as smart as she's nice."

"Oh! you get out, you flatterer," she laughingly rejoined. "There's your friend, Susy Lane, out there. I know she's waiting for you."

Phil took the hint and left the old lady to her breakfast preparations, while he hunted up his younger ally, who awaited him at the head of the stairs.

"I'm dying to see you," she excitedly cried. "I want to hear all about it. Every word."

"All right," Phil replied. "Sit down here comfortable, and we'll talk."

Taking their accustomed seat at the head of the stairs, and snuggling up against each other lovingly, Phil proceeded to describe the adventures of the previous night, to the intense interest of Susy.

"And you are sure Miss Alice is taken to the ship?" she eagerly asked.

"Just as sure as there's water in the river."

"And whatever will you do now?"

"Git her out," said Phil, confidently.

"But it wont be so easy, Phil."

"I dont spose it will," Phil replied. "But if I cant do it easy I'll do it hard. She's got to come." And Phil set his teeth in stern energy.

"I believe you," cried Susy, enthusiastically. "You are just the best and smartest fellow. And I love you for it. I would not give a cent to like a boy that was stupid."

"You're my little sweetheart, Susy," said Phil, kissing her tenderly. "And I like you better than all the gals I ever seed."

"Ever saw, you mean," replied Susy, with a grimace.

"Have it your own way," rejoined Phil. "It dont make no odds to me."

"Hallo! This is fun," spoke a gleeful voice behind them. "This the way you two spend your mornin'?"

"That you, Dick?" asked Phil, coolly. "Let's look at you."

He jumped up and turned the boy around, like a model.

"I'll swow if he aint got a clean face! Look here, Susy. Did you ever see sich a good-lookin' chap as Dick, with the dirt off?"

"Oh! you dry up!" said Dick, blushing. "Best come to breakfast. Mrs. Hardy sent me for you."

"I dont never go back on breakfasts," said Phil, energetically.

The boys certainly had a most excellent appetite, and cleaned Mrs. Hardy's table as clean as a new pin.

"Put that letter away, granny," remarked Phil, pointing to the letter which Alice had dropped, and which now lay on the mantle. "It mought be useful some day."

"I will attend to it 'fter I get the breakfast things washed," she rejoined, going busily to work.

"Wide awake, Dick?" asked Phil.

"Bright as a dollar," he replied.

"Then let's make fur the wharf. Dont want Mr. Russell and his perlice to git down ahead of us."

It was not fifteen minutes when they found themselves again in sight of the Strongbow.

Almost at the same moment a gentleman stopped at the extensive mansion of which the Hardys occupied an humble fraction.

By dint of inquiry he soon found his way to the suit of rooms which constituted the home of our friends, and knocked at the door of the apartment which Mrs. Hardy used in the combined sense of kitchen, dining-room and parlor.

The old lady opened the door, and gazed with surprise on her strange and well-dressed visitor.

"Mrs. Hardy?" he said, inquiringly.

"Yes, sir, that is my name."

"I hope you will pardon this intrusion. I had a little errand with you."

"Why certainly, sir. But do come in. Dont let me keep you standing there in the entry."

Thanking her, the stranger entered and helped himself to a seat.

"Did you not have a young lady staying with you named Miss Homer?"

"Well, I declare! How ever did you know that? Yes, she was here, poor thing! She left here day before yesterday, and was run away with by some villains who wanted to kill her. So my Phil says. Is it possible you know her?"

"I am an old friend," said the gentleman, smiling oddly at the revelations of the simple-minded and garrulous old lady. "And your Phil is very much mistaken. You can take my word for that."

"I am ever so glad to hear that, sir," replied Mrs. Hardy. "Poor dear. I quite grew to love her."

"Yes, she is a charming girl," the gentleman responded, stroking his hair with a grave motion. "Is your boy named Philip Hardy?"

"Exactly. He is my grandson. And one of the best boys," answered the delighted old lady. "There is nothing he can't do."

"I have met him," said the gentleman. "He is a very intelligent lad. Where is he now?"

"Deary me knows! I could as well keep track of the wind."

"He is a little wrong about Miss Homer, though," continued the gentleman. "She is at the home of her aunt. I left her there only an hour ago."

"I am glad enough to hear that," replied Mrs. Hardy, from whom Phil had wisely concealed the extent of his discoveries. "I hope she wont forget to come see me."

"She will not easily forget her friends," the gentleman smilingly responded. "She wished me to stop here for something which she left behind. She will call on you soon."

"I hope so indeed," exclaimed Mrs. Hardy, twirling a dish-cloth in her hands forgetfully, in her pleasure at this remembrance. "But what was it? I dont think of anythin'."

"A letter, I believe."

"Oh, yes! She did drop one. It is here."

Mrs. Hardy had it in her hands in a minute. She paused with a movement of embarrassment as she thought of Phil's warning.

"Is that it?" he asked, unconcernedly.

"Yes—" hesitatingly. "But I forgot. I was told to keep it."

"Ah! Miss Homer should not have sent me for it, then."

"It was not she," replied the old lady, still more embarrassed. "It was—Phil."

"Oh! Phil, was it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very proper in Phil. He was sharp enough to know that nobody but Miss Homer herself, or some one sent by her, should receive her letter. He is certainly a very intelligent boy."

The gentleman rose, wiped his brow with his handkerchief, and turned as if to go.

"Good-day, Mrs. Hardy," he said. "My time is limited."

"And the letter?" she faltered.

"The letter?—Well, I declare, it slipped out of my mind that minute. Yes, let me have it. I shall see that it is returned to Miss Homer."

Fully reassured by his indifferent manner, Mrs. Hardy tendered him the letter, crossing the floor to where he stood carelessly in the doorway.

"And give my love to Miss Homer with the letter," she said, as she handed him the epistle.

"Why, certainly. I know she will be glad to hear of your good wishes," he replied, a covert smile of triumph on his face.

His hand was indolently extended. Mrs. Hardy was on the point of placing the coveted document in his hand.

But there is many a slip between cup and lip. Another hand, a small white palm and slender fingers, suddenly extended itself between them, and snatched the sheet from his very grasp.

A peal of childish laughter, half merry, half hysterical, followed.

"I shall keep this for Miss Alice," spoke the sweet voice of Susy Lane, and her bright young face beamed out before them.

"Why, Susy!" cried Mrs. Hardy, in surprise and anger.

"Who is this rude child?" the gentleman angrily inquired.

"Give him that letter, Susy," commanded Mrs. Hardy. "He is a friend of Miss Homer's. She sent him for it."

"Perhaps then he can tell where he has sent her?" exclaimed Susy, glancing shrewdly into his vexed face.

"Give me the letter, miss," was his harsh response, as he suddenly sought to grasp her arm.

But she was too quick for him. She darted lightly back toward the stairs, crying out:

"You dont know him, Mrs. Hardy. He is the man who followed us from the Park. He is Cunningham, the one who has tried to kill Miss Alice.—Oh! you hateful man, you ought to remember me!"

It was a very unlovely grimace which Susy made, as she stood at the head of the stairs and looked mockingly at the discomfited villain.

With a curse of bitter chagrin he darted after her, she running lightly down the stairs.

Snatchin' g up the broom as the most convenient article of offense, Mrs. Hardy followed, her feelings toward the gentleman very suddenly and utterly changed.

He might as well have chased a will-of-the-wisp as light-footed Susy Lane. She was out of sight before he had descended the first flight of steps. Only a merry laugh told that she was flying onward, in advance.

But the avenger came furiously on behind. As he paused near the door to take breath, and look round for the little hoyden, he was more surprised than delighted by the sharp impress of a broom between his shoulders.

"Get out of the house, at once, you kidnapping villain!" exclaimed the old lady, bringing the broom down to emphasize every word. "I'll dust your coat for you, you murderer! To think of your daring to come here, and lie to me, and praise my poor Phil to my face! I'll cure you of it!"

And the broom was plied with redoubled energy.

With a savage curse he turned and sought to grasp her weapon. But he did not calculate on the power of an infuriated woman, when armed with her favorite weapon.

The broom took him face and back, with indiscriminating rapidity. In vain he tried to seize it. Mrs. Hardy sprung round like a furious wasp, using her weapon with every leap.

At last, utterly conquered, he turned and fled from the house, cursing bitterly, and followed by the laughter of a gang of idlers as Mrs. Hardy pursued him into the street, calling out:

"Come back again when you want another letter. I'll be sure to give it to you."

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE STRONGBOW.

NEAR the wharf the boys met their confederate, Joe Dot, who was sauntering carelessly along as if he had no business in life except to bask in the sunshine.

"Hallo! Joe. How's the jiants?" called out Phil.

"The jiants are well enough. It's you that's a little lunny," retorted Joe.

"Dont b'lieve in them yet, hey?"

"Bet I do them! And in dwarfs and hobgoblins, too."

"Well, you're a queer chap fur a Yorker.—How 'bout Tim Fagan?"

"He aint moved out of his den, so far as I've seen. And I've watched kind of close."

"I'll be fiddled if there he dont go now!" cried Dick. "And making straight for the Strongbow."

"He'd best step aboard soon then, or he might step overboard," returned Joe.

"What do you mean?" Phil sharply asked.

"Only that the Strongbow is getting ready to draw out of dock."

"The blazes she is! Know where she is goin'?"

"No."

"Scoot down there, and ask some of the sailors. Be innocent like, you know."

Without a word Joe left them.

"I wish Mr. Russell was here with his perlice," said Phil anxiously. "If she's goin' to put to sea it mought be a bad job."

"We'd have to foller her, that's all. In a steam tug or something."

Joe returned after a few minutes' absence.

"She's not going far," he remarked. "Only across to Brooklyn. She's to take in part of her cargo at Longmyer's wharf."

"Know the place like a book," cried Phil, well pleased with this information. "Spose, too, they're tryin' to fling us off the track.—Though they must think I'm drowned, and they dont know that there's anybody else on their trail."

"You're worth a dozen soaked herrings yet, Phil," remarked Dick.

"Why dont you appear to them—like a ghost?" asked Joe.

"By Jove, that's a good ideal!" exclaimed Phil, slapping his knee in delight. "Wouldn't like nothin' better than to make that little capting skip. If I dont cross the river in the Strongbow, shoot me!"

"It's dangerous, Phil," cautioned Dick.

"So is walkin' on the curbstones," said Phil, decidedly. "There's so much danger a-goin' a feller never knows but a brick might jump out of the pavement and hit him in the head. One danger aint no wuss than another."

Phil resolutely walked down to the wharf, followed by his two companions. He was too wide awake, though, to let himself be seen by his enemies on board. He reconnoitered from behind a post.

The ship did show indications of immediate departure. The sailors were gathering up a few articles belonging to her, which lay upon the wharf. Outside lay a tug, which had just steamed in, and was preparing to attach itself to the vessel. The captain and mate stood amidstships, directing these movements. Fagan also was there, talking with the mate.

A quick thought flashed across Phil's mind. He turned to Dick.

"You're good on the dance and song, Dick. Jist you jump aboard there, near the bow. Give them a

break-down, and some kind of a ditty.—I'll begittin' stowed away on board while the captin and mate are kickin' you ashore."

"I dont know exactly how I'll like the kicking," returned Dick, ruefully.

"Oh! hop round like a skeeter, and they wont hurt you. Pass round your hat, like an Italian minstrel with an organ.—Come, dig, boy! You aint afraid of them chaps?"

"Not much!" said Dick, walking boldly forward.

"I spose ther'll a gentleman, named Mr. Russell, be here soon," explained Phil to Joe Dot. "He'll likely have some perlicers with him. And he'll be too late, as gentlemen allers are. Jist you tell him where the ship has gone to."

"What kind of a looking cove?"

"A handsome gentleman. Bout as high as you are, but twice as stout. Dressed in a mighty stylish gray rig."

"Guess I'll know him. What's your dodge now?"

"To sell out a couple of rascals, that's all."

By this time Dick had reached the ship. Leaping lightly to the deck he stationed himself near the capstan, and commenced a popular ditty in a shrill boyish voice, that was by no means unmusical.

The sailors at once ceased their labors, and turned to look at him. He commenced a dance with the chorus, a lively break-down which seemed to please them mightily, to judge by their laughter and clapping.

"Hillo! What's broke loose here?" cried the mate, suddenly ceasing his conversation with Fagan, and hastening forward.

"Only a bit of fun, captain," Dick humbly replied. "Thought you wouldn't keef if a poor boy picked up a few pennies from these brave sailors."

"We have no time for any of your nonsense," growled the mate, a little mollified, however, by Dick's shrewd advancement in his title. "Come, slide now."

"Oh! let the boy finish his song," protested old Bowline, the privileged sailor. "It wont take him a minute, and we dont often hear as good a song."

"Hurry up then!" returned the mate, more graciously. "And take care you dont show yourself here again. We want no tomfoolery."

The captain and Fagan had walked forward after the mate. But as the latter had taken the disturbing force in hand, his superior officer was content to leave it in his hands, and stood in silence.

In fact Captain Monroe liked a good song as well as any of his men, and was not at all disposed to interfere in Dick's ditty.

Nor did he object to the jig with which the lad finished his amateur effort at melody.

"Hope you'll drop some thin' now in a poor boy's hat, that's got a sick mother at home, and ten small brothers and sisters, without a bite in the house, and nothin to eat, and only my talent to keep them from starvin'."

Dick got this off with the true professional whine, adding a series of other particulars of his extreme poverty as he circulated through the group of sailors.

"And I hope the captain's a-going to drop in something handsome," he continued, shaking his small receipts as he presented his ragged headgear to the mate.

With a subdued growl the latter deposited a small piece of money.

"May you git it twice back agin," said Dick, fervently. "And I know the commodore aint going to forgit poor Dick, the minstrel."

"You see, you dont rank above me yet," said Captain Monroe, laughing. "Here's the price of a loaf, my boy. And now you'd best be going."

"Not till this gentleman has given me that piece of silver that's burning his fingers," persisted Dick, handing the hat to Fagan.

"I've got no money for vagabonds," and the latter turned surlily away.

"And I called him a gentleman!" said Dick, ruefully. "Well, well, the best will make mistakes, you see. We both made one."

"What do you mean?" asked Fagan, sharply turning.

"I aint no walkin' dictionary," replied the undaunted boy. "Thought I talked plain enough."

It was certainly plain enough for the sailors to understand and to relish it, judging by their subdued laugh.

Fagan would have made some fierce reply, but was prevented by Dick's commencing another song, which he rattled off with intense liveliness.

As he sung his eyes were fixed aft, and saw what none of the others did, the gliding of a small form along the deck, and its disappearance down the companionway. Phil was fairly on board.

"Come, get out now," cried the mate. "We are going to cast off. Do you want to go to sea?"

"Wouldn't mind goin' to Brooklyn," said Dick, with a shrewd wink. "It'll save ferrage."

"Who told you we were bound for Brooklyn?"

"Maybe I dreamt it, last night."

"Cast off that rope!" cried the captain, sharply.

The mate was instantly recalled to a sense of his duty, and stopped his chatter with Dick to attend to getting the ship under way.

The boy was as good as his word. He kept aboard, while the vessel slowly left the dock and commenced her short voyage across the river.

Not exactly caring to encounter the mate, he went below, into the sailors' quarters, where he occupied himself in a voyage of discovery of the ship's interior.

Meanwhile Phil, as we have seen, had slipped stealthily aboard the vessel, and introduced himself into the cabin while Dick was attracting the attention of all on board.

It was a dangerous position for the boy to be in, and he looked around for a place of concealment in case of being suddenly intruded upon.

The cabin of the Strongbow formed a room of considerable size, and rather plainly furnished, a table, a few chairs, and a lounge, being the principal articles.

There were a couple of state-rooms on each side. Two of these stood partly open, forming the bedrooms of the captain and mate. The other two were locked.

Phil next tried the door in the forward part of the cabin, leading to the room in which he had been confined. It was only closed by a bolt on the cabin side, and he quickly opened it, and entered his old prison.

The apartment was a contracted one, and very faintly lighted by a dim illumination coming from the forward part of the vessel.

He had more than half expected to find Alice confined here, and it was with a feeling of disappointment that he found the room empty.

"Where in blazes have they got her, then?" he muttered. "I dont know any other place 'cept it's one of them state-rooms. Here's a door leading forward. Maybe I'd best explore."

The room formed a sort of lumber-closet for the cabin, and Phil stumbled, in the faint light, over various articles, as he sought the door which his quick eyes had made out.

It proved to be, like the other, fastened only on his side. In a moment he had it open and was gazing forward into the vessel.

It was a dim profundity into which he looked. The cargo had been removed from this part of the 'tween-decks, and the hatches fastened down. Its only light came through a grating in the bulkhead forward, and lost itself in the center of the wide concavity, failing to penetrate the dark sides.

"That's all right," thought Phil, stepping boldly forward. "Dunno what this bucket of water is left settin' here fur, 'cept they want to guv a feller a foot-bath.—Hello! here's a hole and a ladder. Guess I'll take a look further down."

The ladder led down to a lower hold, which lay in almost complete darkness, the light which came down with Phil hardly revealing the spot on which he stood. All else was profound gloom, except where, in what appeared an interminable distance forward, a faint beam of light struggled through what appeared to be a closed hatchway.

"Well, if it aint dark enough to cut, here, I'll sell out," muttered Phil, venturing several steps forward in the darkness.

There was no obstruction. This hold, too, had formed part of the stowage capacity of the ship, and was now empty.

Satisfied with his explorations so far, and growing anxious about the main object of his adventure, Phil made the best of his way back, reaching the small apartment adjoining the cabin.

Before venturing further he looked warily through a minute opening in the door. His quick ear caught, at the same moment, a step on the cabin stairs.

It was Captain Monroe, who now paused in the center of the cabin, his small, fox-like face peering warily around. Phil could see that he was nervous over something.

An idea occurred to the boy. Going cautiously back to where he had seen the bucket of water, he dipped his head into it as deeply as the bucket would admit. He came up streaming like a mermaid with salt water.

"Now for it," muttered Phil, in a choking voice.

When he again reached his point of view, he found Captain Monroe in the act of unlocking one of the state-room doors.

"That's where he keeps Miss Alice," thought Phil. "Now to give him a header."

The captain was on the point of looking into the room whose door he had partly opened, when he was startled by an odd noise behind him.

He turned quickly, to behold, with starting eyes, a small head protruding from the lumber-room into the cabin, a head dripping with water, the hair hanging in soaked masses about the face that seemed to ooze water. He knew the face to be that of the boy whose helpless form he had flung into the river.

"I've been drowned!" muttered Phil, in sepulchral tones.

The captain's face grew white as he gazed at this apparition, his superstitious soul full of dread.

"I've been drowned!" repeated Phil, in tones that seemed drawn from as far down as his toes.

It was too much for the guilty nature of the captain. With a suppressed cry of dread he ran for the companionway, and dashed up the stairs as if in fear of being carried bodily to the lower regions.

With a laugh of triumph at his success, Phil hastily entered the cabin. The door of the state-room stood ajar, and he lost no time in flinging it wide open.

It was as he had hoped. There lay, reclining on a short lounge, the form of Alice Homer, her eyes staring oddly out at the intruder.

She seemed to be just recovering from the effects of the narcotic, and to be in a stupefied condition.

There was no time to be lost. Phil caught her rudely by the arm, crying:

"Come, Miss Alice! Git up instanter! Your life's in danger, here!"

Stirred by his energetic appeal, she tried to obey, and raised herself to her feet by his vigorous aid. She tottered, though, like a drunken person, and seemed not to understand where she was nor what was expected of her.

Half leading and half dragging, Phil hurried her out of the room, the door of which he locked and appropriated the key.

"This way! Quick as lightning!" he exclaimed, impelling her forward.

She yielded involuntarily, like one walking in a dream. In a minute Phil had her through the lumber-room and into the hold beyond.

Leaving her there, he returned to close the doors he had left open behind him.

At that moment he heard the heavy step of the mate descending into the cabin, and his harsh voice muttering:

"Ghosts be blowed! There's a screw loose in Cap Monroe's brains."

CHAPTER XXI.

RATS IN A TRAP.

THERE was no time to be lost. The mate was of different caliber from the captain, and would be more likely to discharge a chair at Phil's soaking head than to run from him.

He said he had opened the state-room door. I dont see any signs of it," growled the mate, taking a key from his own pocket and applying it to the lock.

Phil hastened from the door at which he had been listening, and hurried back to where he had left his charge.

"There'll be somethin' hot to pay soon," he said. "Wont take him long to find that the other door's unbolted."

There came a subdued roar from the cabin. The mate had just discovered that his bird had flown; the state-room was empty!

"Come, Miss Alice," Phil energetically exclaimed. "These are dangerous quarters. We must be getting."

Her previous hasty movement had partly recalled her flown senses, and she yielded to Phil with better command of her nerves.

He led her to the hatchway, opening to the lower hold, and aided her, with some difficulty, down the narrow ladder.

"Here we are now," said Phil, cheerily, "in darkness as thick as jelly. And it wont be five minutes afore we're follered. Feel better, Miss Alice?"

"My head is very thick and confused," she hesitatingly replied. "Where are we?"

"Away down in the second story cellar of the Strongbow. Know who I am?"

"No," she uneasily answered.

"Thought you didn't," responded Phil, with a slight laugh. "I'm Phil Hardy. I'm the chap that took you out of the water once and that's a goin' to take you out of the fire, now."

"Oh, yes; I remember you," she replied dubiously. It was evident that her faculties had not fully returned.

"Wait here a minute," cried Phil.

He dashed up the ladder to the deck above. In a minute he returned with the half-emptied bucket.

"Here! Dash some of this in your face," he ordered. "It'll wash the cobwebs out of your brain quicker'n any thing I know of."

Phil held up the bucket while she mechanically obeyed him, giving her face a plentiful ablution in the cold water.

It had the effect he anticipated. Her consciousness returned more fully, and she looked around her with a clearer idea of the situation.

"Towels aint handy," explained Phil. "But it's only water. It'll dry off."

He carefully placed the bucket at the foot of the ladder, while she partially dried her face with her handkerchief.

"Here they come!" Phil cautiously remarked, his quick hearing catching a footstep on the deck above.

"We've got to be movin'!"

Taking her hand he led her through the gloom toward the light which so faintly illuminated the hold.

It was a forward hatchway, closed with grating, through whose openings the light came down.

Phil ran hastily up the ladder which led to it, and tried to push it aside. His attempt was vain; it was fastened above.

At the same moment a gleam of light shone from the other hatchway, and they saw the sturdy figure of the mate descending.

"If we aint rats in a trap, then there's no pumpkins," muttered Phil, looking doubtfully around.

"Wonder if Dick's aboard?" I'll guv him a call, anyhow."

With his lips to the grating Phil whistled, repeating it three times in quick succession.

It was answered in an unexpected way, by the sudden extinguishment of the light aft, and by a fierce curse from the lips of the mate. Phil at once divined the cause. He clapped his hands on his knees in delight.

"If he aint stepped into the water-bucket, sell me out! Wish I only had another bucket, full! I'd guv him a shower-bath, sure."

"What shall we do, Phil?" asked Alice, anxiously, as she heard her foe cursing as he ascended the ladder again.

"Wish I only knowed," answered Phil. "I'm desprate afored we're in a trap. If Dick was only about now."

His words were answered by a repetition of his signal, from the deck above the grating.

"Hello! that's clever," cried Phil, quickly ascending the ladder. "Here we are, Dick. Open this confounded trap-door, or we'll be in trouble, sure."

"All right!" came the voice of Dick from above, and his honest eyes were visible through the opening. "Hold hard. I'll fetch her soon."

"Here comes our enemy again," said Alice, in a low tone.

The light which now flashed through the hold was more intense than that which had been so suddenly put out. But it was also more contracted in range. It came from a dark lantern, which threw but a nar-

now line of light, leaving the remainder of the hold in deeper gloom than ever.

The bearer stood on the deck, slowly turning, and throwing the sharp beam of light successively over every point of the hold.

"What shall we do?" asked Alice, shrinking instinctively from the coming gleam.

"Wish Dick would hurry up," was Phil's answer. "We'll be seen sure, afore he gits it open."

The revolving light came nearer and nearer in its progress round the circle of the hold.

"Mought keep ahead of it if it weren't fur bein' heard," muttered Phil. "Ha! come this way, Miss Alice!"

He had just caught a glimpse of a possible covert. Taking her hand he led her quickly but noiselessly to the side of the ship, where lay a heap of old cable.

Crouching down behind this, they were covered from sight of the mate. In a minute more the light passed slowly over them, its intense gleam revealing every portion of that section of the hold, but throwing the space in which they crouched into deeper darkness.

It moved over their heads and slowly traversed aft along the deck. The two fugitives emerged from their concealment and approached the ladder. At the same instant a sliding sound was heard, and the grating moved quickly back, Dick's head appearing at the opening.

"Up the ladder, Miss Alice! Quick as lightning! It's your only chance!" cried Dick, in excited tones. The noise had attracted the attention of the mate. He threw the light of the lantern upon the fugitives. They stood, too, in a circle of daylight entering at the open hatch.

The foot of Alice was already upon the ladder. The mate dropped his lantern and ran hastily toward them, with a fierce imprecation.

"Quick!" cried Phil, excitedly, lending Alice his assistance. "Give her your hand, Dick!"

Dick obeyed, and the trembling fugitive was rapidly drawn up the steps.

Phil was about to run up the ladder with the nimbleness of a squirrel, when he felt a heavy hand on his shoulder, and turned to look in a pair of revengeful eyes.

"Shoot the hatch, Dick!" he shouted. "Thunder's broke loose here!"

Dick at once obeyed. The hatch slid to its place. The devoted lad was left in the power of his furious foe.

CHAPTER XXII.

FOR LIFE OR DEATH.

"I WILL be even with you anyhow, you meddling young imp!" the mate savagely cried, as he attempted to jerk Phil down from the ladder.

But this was not so easily done. The boy clung desperately to the rounds, and tug as the infuriated man might he could not loosen his hold.

"I'll settle you, you wharf rat!" came in a furious growl from the lips of the mate.

Releasing his grasp of Phil's arm with his right hand, but still holding his shoulder with his left, he struck a fierce blow at the boy's head. It would have been bad for Phil had that blow reached him, for the mate was a man of great muscular power, and put all his strength into the blow.

But a man cannot use all his strength in two directions. The grasp of his left hand naturally relaxed, as he put his vigor into the right.

In an instant Phil darted down the ladder, jerking himself clear from the loosened hold, and the mate's fist came in contact with hard wood instead of soft flesh, with a vim that was in no wise agreeable to his knuckles.

A mocking laugh broke from the boy's lips as he darted away with the speed of a hare. The mate instantly followed with a loud imprecation. A hard chase began, round and round the interior of the hold.

Phil's object was to reach the ladder, and escape to the upper deck. But his foe divined this, and chased him so closely that he had no opportunity to do so.

The mate was a fast runner, and it was as much as Phil could do to keep out of his clutches. The darkness of the hold favored the fugitive, and he made many a quick double and turn, as the chase continued three or four times round the circuit of the hold.

At his last turn Phil made straight for the ladder. But his pursuer was not three feet behind him, a low curse breaking from his set lips at every few steps.

Phil stooped as he passed, and snatched up the overturned bucket. Looking back over his shoulder, he dashed this impromptu weapon behind him, at the ankles of his antagonist. His aim was a true one. The mate stumbled and pitched heavily forward over the obstruction.

Phil's next move was quick as lightning. He turned and darted up the ladder, reaching the top of it by the time his foe had regained his feet.

Phil lay on the deck above, looking down through the hatchway, and breaking into a tantalizing laugh at his discomfited foe. He had not calculated sufficiently on the exasperation of the mate. There was a blinding flash that lit up the hold for an instant, a loud report, and something scored the boy's skull as if he had been touched by a hot iron.

The maddened mate had fired a pistol, point-blank, at his mocking foe.

"Guess it's time to git," said Phil, coolly. "Dont want to be stoppin' n'body's bullets."

The mate was by this time at the foot of the ladder, and was ascending hand over hand.

Phil ran quickly forward, entering and passing through the lumber room, and thence through the second door into the cabin. He closed this door with a bang, and bolted it behind him.

He turned again to encounter the tall, brawny figure of Tim Fagan, who stood in the middle of the cabin, looking at him with astonishment.

As Phil darted up the stairs to the deck there came a push at the door he had just fastened, followed by loud knocks and fierce curses.

Fagan at once opened it, admitting the mate.

"Where is the boy?" cried the latter, breathing hard, and his eyes glaring around the cabin.

"On deck," said Fagan. "What was that noise I heard? It sounded like a pistol-shot."

With no other answer than a harsh growl, the mate rushed for the deck, followed quickly by his astonished confederate.

The situation was an interesting one. The Strongbow was now almost across the stream, and was rounding up to enter her dock on the Brooklyn side. A group of persons stood on the pier watching her approach. A short distance in the rear of the ship came a small, swift tug-boat, heading for the same wharf. On her deck was visible the form of Harvey Russell accompanied by several other persons.

Amidships of the Strongbow stood Phil, breathing hard from his late exertions, and facing the captain, who shrunk back in nervous fright from what he was still half disposed to consider an apparition.

Further forward stood Dick, who had just emerged from the fore-castle. A group of sailors, headed by old Ben Bowline, stood near him, looking on with intense interest.

"A feller mought think you weren't much used to ghosts," said Phil, jeeringly, to the captain. "Maybe you'd like to feel me to see if I'm solid or not."

"I would!" cried the mate, who had approached the boy from behind, and who now grasped his shoulder. "I've got you, you young burlgar, and if I don't make you sweat, shoot me!"

"Give me a hand here, Fagan," he continued, in a voice intended for the ears of the sailors. "I caught the little devil trying to go through our lockers. I'll truss him up and give him a baker's dozen with a cowhide to teach him better habits."

Nothing loth, Fagan came forward to his assistance. But they did not know the capabilities of a full-fledged wharf rat.

With a quick stoop and a squirm of the body which seemed as if it could only have come from long practice, Phil slipped like an eel out of his coat, leaving the latter dilapidated garment in the mate's hands.

Wild with anger, Hendricks sprung forward to seize him again. But he encountered another unexpected obstacle in the form of Dirty Dick, who stepped with apparent awkwardness in the way.

Boy and man went down in a heap together. While the infuriated mate was striving to regain his feet, Dick nimbly crept out, and ran forward to safer quarters.

But there was no second foe in Hendricks's mind. He looked round for Phil, and saw, to his surprise, that the boy was half-way up the shrouds, climbing like a cat to the mast-head.

"Come down!" was the fierce command. "Come down! or I'll bring you down a dead weight!" And he significantly grasped his pistol.

Phil's reply was a taunting laugh. He had caught sight of the approaching tug, and ran out nimbly on the yard-arm for a clearer view.

There was considerable excitement on the deck of the ship. Ben Bowline had instinctively started forward on seeing the mate's significant gesture. It was but a step, however. The involuntary sense of obedience of a sailor to his officer restrained him.

Captain Monroe stood with his eyes fixed on Phil, perched on the extremity of the main yard-arm.

A visible tremor shook the frame of the nervously-organized villain. He could scarcely yet believe the boy to be living flesh and blood.

At the opening of the deck leading to the men's quarters appeared a fair young face, unnoticed by any of the deeply-interested spectators. It was the face of Alice Homer, her eyes wide with fright as she realized the situation.

"Hillo! there!" yelled Phil, hailing the tug, on which he recognized a familiar face. "Pile on steam and run aboard this rotten old tub! Do you hear, Mr. Russell? Your girl's here, among a pack of bloody murderers."

"Come down! or I'll bring you down!" screamed the furious mate, with extended pistol.

"You dry up," was Phil's defiant answer.

The mate was far past the bounds of reason. Heedless of a warning cry from the wharf, now very near, or of a thrilling scream from the deck behind him, he took steady aim and fired at the reckless boy.

The lookers-on thought they saw a quick shudder pass through Phil's frame. With a leap that seemed convulsive he sprung straight out from his perch, and cleft the air swiftly in his downward fall.

A cry of horror arose. Even if only wounded by the ball it looked as if he must strike the deck in his descent and be crushed out of all human shape.

But, Phil's lucky star stood by him. He came down like a shot, coiled up into a ball-like shape, and just grazing the bulwarks in his fall. As he did so his frame shot out straight as an arrow, his feet striking the water first. In an instant he was lost to view, beneath the liquid plain.

The scream heard had come from the pallid lips of Alice Homer, who sprang recklessly toward the mate, with the wild hope of diverting the villain from his aim.

She caught his arm, but too late to prevent the shot, and stood gazing with appalled eyes at the fearful descent of the boy from his aerial perch.

"Good heavens! you have killed him!" she screamed, running to the side of the vessel, and looking fearfully over.

"Ha! my pretty mad lady!" cried the mate, his

mind diverted to a new object. "So you are out of your cell? This will never do."

He sprung forward and seized her by the arm. "Here, Captain Monroe!" he continued. "Help me with her. She will be in one of her frantic spells in a minute, and then ten men could not hold her."

The eyes of Alice were turned upward in wonder and alarm at this bold effort to convert her into a maniac.

"She is no madder than I am," screamed Dirty Dick, rushing recklessly toward them.

But a back-handed movement of Tim Fagan's arm stretched this puny rescuer sprawling upon the deck, as the brawny innkeeper hurried to the aid of the mate.

"Keep back, men!" cried Captain Monroe to the sailors, who showed an inclination to interfere. "The girl is mad, I tell you. We were bringing her to an asylum. She has broken from her room."

"Is the boy mad, too?" sternly responded Ben Bowline, who had hastened to the side of the vessel to look for the form of Phil. But the water yet hid the fallen youth from view.

"Some of you men get a carriage, at once," cried a commanding voice from the wharf, which the vessel was now nearly grazing. "It was the handsome face and elegantly-dressed figure of Andrew Cunningham, his smooth cheek marked by more than one scratch from the broom of Mrs. Hardy."

Alice looked appealingly to the sailors. But they shrunk back, evidently believing her indeed mad, and not caring to interfere.

"Will no one help me?" she asked, in a tremulous voice.

Cunningham stepped briskly forward. "Come, come, my dear miss," he said in a soothing tone, "you are among friends. Now do be calm. We are going to take you to a very pleasant home."

She looked up with a faint cry of terror on seeing the face of her ruthless foe so near her, and shrunk tremblingly back from the polluting touch of his hand, her face growing deathly white.

Quickly as the incidents had passed, two or three minutes had elapsed. And yet, the vigilant eyes of Ben Bowline had seen no trace of Phil. The face of the old man grew dark with anger as he realized that the boy was either drowned, or slain by the bullet of the murderer.

He straightened up his tall form, his eyes fixed meaningly on the mate. At the same moment the pursuing tug came alongside; Harvey Russell standing erect, white, and stern as a fate, upon her deck.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HARVEY RUSSELL TAKES A HAND.

HARVEY RUSSELL had not been inactive on the morning of the day so full of stirring incidents.

His first visit had been to the police authorities, whom he had notified of the abduction, and of his discoveries concerning it.

There were three officers accompanying him when he left and proceeded toward the wharf where lay the Strongbow.

First, however, he went to 310 Globe street, the directions of Phil's residence as he had received them from that individual. He wished to see where his youthful aid was, and to form his own plans accordingly.

On ascending the stairs he met a bright-eyed little girl, whom he stopped to question in regard to the locality of the rooms which Phil Hardy honored with his residence.

"Why, just ahead, sir. That door at the end of the passage. That is Mrs. Hardy you see inside the room."

"But it is the boy, her son, I want to find."

"Her son!" cried Susy, breaking into a merry laugh. "Why, Phil is her grandson. She is dreadful old, you know, and he is a little fellow; not much bigger than me."

"I shall find him in there then?" asked Mr. Russell, advancing.

"Oh dear no, sir! He went out more than an hour ago. Excuse me, but are you not Mr. Russell?"

"Why, how could you know that?"

"Oh! Phil told me all about you. How you were in love with Miss Alice, and all. You see, Phil dont keep anything at all from me."

"It seems not," replied Mr. Russell, with a laugh and slightly blushing. "And he dont keep anything from me either, for he told me about a little sweetheart of his, who was ever so much in love with him."

"Now he had better have held his tongue," said Susy, coloring. "Did he tell you her name?"

"Yes, he said it was Susy—Susy Lane, I think."

"He told you a story, then, for I dont love him one bit," exclaimed the piqued little beauty. "Not much, I mean," she corrected herself. "And I dont like him to be going around telling everybody he meets such nonsense."

"But maybe you do not consider it properly," suggested Mr. Russell, with an amused glance at his irate auditor.

"Why, how do you mean, sir?"

"Dont you see that it only shows that Phil is always thinking of you? And he loves you so that he thinks it must be you loving him."

"Why so I do, a little!" she impulsively exclaimed. "Phil is ever so nice.—Oh, Mrs. Hardy, here is a gentleman looking for Phil."

The old lady had just left her room, and stood in the passage near them.

"I am sorry, sir, but my boy is out," she said, courteously.

"So I have just heard from this young lady."

"This is Mr. Russell," said Alice, introducing.

"The gentleman Phil spoke of, you know. The one he said was sweet on Miss Alice."

Mr. Russell was on the point of answering; a little impatiently, as it seemed. Then he paused and laughed.

"You shouldn't speak that way before the gentleman, Susy," expostulated Mrs. Hardy. "But I am sure Miss Alice was worth loving, for she was the sweetest, loveliest, prettiest, charmingest creature that my old eyes ever looked on, and I have seen beauties in my time. I know I was in love with her myself, and I don't blame anybody else."

Mr. Russell listened with all a lover's pleasure to this warm praise. He would not have cared had the old lady gone on for an hour in the same vein.

"She is an old friend of mine," he explained. "And perhaps I do like her a little. But I am afraid our friend Phil has drawn a good deal on his imagination."

"I don't believe he has," said Susy, looking him squarely in the eyes. "And I don't think you ought to be ashamed if you were a dozen times in love with such a lady."

Susy's tone was a little indignant.

"Yet somebody I know was angry with Phil just now, for talking about her."

"Oh! that was different," responded Susy, quickly. "He keeps talking that way, and he knows I don't like it."

"Why you shouldn't be ashamed to be in love with such a fine fellow as Phil."

"I ain't ashamed, either," she replied, turning on her heel lightly, and walking away.

It was with a merry laugh that Mr. Russell excused himself to Mrs. Hardy, and went down to find his companions.

They were waiting somewhat impatiently, and hastened Mr. Russell in their walk to the wharf.

"You would be much too dilatory for a policeman," said the chief of the officers. "Every minute counts in our business."

"I doubt if I was intended by nature for that line of trade," replied Mr. Russell, pleasantly. "Ah! here we are now."

"And there goes our prize," responded the officer, pointing to the ship which was half-way across the river. "We are just the ten minutes late which you wasted in that tenement-house."

"Are you Mr. Russell?" asked a boy on the wharf. "This gentleman is," replied the officer.

"What do you wish, my lad?" Mr. Russell inquired.

"I was just told to tell you that the Strongbow was bound to Longmyer's wharf, in Brooklyn."

"And where is that?"

"Oh! that won't need a directory," said the officer. "We must cross at once."

"By what ferry?"

"By one of our own. As matters stand aboard that vessel, ten minutes may be all-important. There is a tug, under the control of the police, at the next wharf but one. If it is ready for service we will pursue the fugitives."

The boat was found prepared, and in a very few minutes they were upon the river, heading, under full steam, for the ship.

But by this time the Strongbow had achieved two-thirds of her journey, and was rounding to enter her dock ere the rapid tug had got within easy hailing distance.

And it was now evident that the officer's views as to the value of time in police business were well founded. For before their eyes was enacted the tragical occurrence of the murderous shot at Phil Hardy, and his headlong fall into the stream.

But, Harvey Russell had eyes only for another incident. He had caught a glimpse of the brown locks and delicate face of Alice Homer, just rising above the level of the bulwarks.

He was a horror-stricken spectator of her impulsive movement, and his heart throbbed strongly with indignation when the polluting hands of the murderous gang were laid on her for whose little finger he would have bartered his life.

Yet no word came from his white, set lips; no trace of emotion save a fierce impatience marked his impressive face.

"Haste! Haste!" he half-whispered, turning his head back. "Put on all steam! Every second now is precious!"

The tug seemed to leap forward in response to his wishes. He stood on her bow, his eyes glaring, his foot advanced, in readiness to leap.

And now the stern of the ship swung slowly round, just as the tug came up. Not six feet separated them. One fierce spring and the lithe figure of the avenging lover had caught the bulwarks of the Strongbow, and swung himself on deck.

Yet the main actors in the scene of villainy being perpetrated there were so intent upon their work as to be quite unaware of his approach.

"She must go with me," said Cunningham, looking at Alice with assumed kindness. "No one need fear but that the unfortunate lady will be kindly treated."

He sought to take her arm, but she shrunk tremblingly back, her eyes wildly wandering in search of aid.

They lit up with a sudden joy as they caught sight of an approaching form, of a well-remembered face.

"Release her, villain!" cried a voice that was hoarse with intense emotion. "Dare not, for your life, put that false hand on one so innocent and pure as she!"

"Ha! What ranting fellow is this?" asked Cunningham, satirically, turning and confronting the excited young man.

"I am Harvey Russell. I am he that has for years traced your villainous schemes. I now brand you to your face as a robber and murderer!"

A fierce light shot from Cunningham's eyes, such as might come from the eyes of a tiger at the moment of springing. In an instant he had a pistol in his hand, aimed point-blank at his foe.

"This for you, Harvey Russell," he said, with concentrated fury.

But Russell was in no mood to stand and be shot at. The acts of the next few moments were so rapid that the lookers-on could scarcely follow them. Springing forward with a quick leap, in an instant he had grappled with his enemy.

There was the trip of a wrestler, a strong upward heave, a step forward, and Andrew Cunningham was hurled over the side of the ship as easily as if he had been a child.

He struck the water with a loud splash, sinking like a stone from sight.

But the pistol-shot which he had intended for Harvey Russell was not without its victim. He had thrown up his arm at the moment of falling, and pulled the trigger, with a wild attempt at aim.

A loud cry of pain followed, and the fall of a heavy body to the deck.

He had shot his own confederate, Hendricks, the mate.

"Stone dead," said one of the officers, who was now aboard. "He has got it through the brain."

The other two villains started involuntarily back, releasing Alice, who rushed excitedly to her lover.

"Oh, Harvey!" she cried, clinging wildly to him. "Save me! Save me from these men!"

"Do not fear, Alice," was his warm reply. "There is no man of them all dare lay hands on you now. You are safe."

"Will he be drowned?" she asked, falteringly, as the head of Cunningham appeared again above the water.

"Drowned? No. His sins will float him."

The drenched villain was caught by hands from on board the tug, and hauled vigorously out of the water.

He was a pitiable object, with all the elegance washed out of him by the streaming fluid.

"Hold there!" cried one of the officers, as he stepped vigorously forward. "You are my prisoner."

"Your prisoner?" replied the enraged villain. "On what charge?"

"On charges enough. Abduction, false imprisonment, and a double attempt at murder. If that is not enough, there is the murder of the man whom you have just shot."

"Harvey Russell?" asked Cunningham, a quick light of joy in his eyes.

"No. It is Mr. Hendricks, the mate of the Strongbow, who has fallen a victim to your murderous designs."

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOMES AGAIN.

THE tables were completely turned on the would-be murderers. One of them lay dead, cut off without a moment's warning by what seemed the directing hand of Providence.

The three others were in the hands of the officers, the captain and his brawny confederate overwhelmed at this sudden and unlooked-for ending of their plots.

As for their employer, Cunningham, he was a miserable-looking object, dripping with water, and with all the starch washed, not only out of his clothes, but out of his whole nature. He seemed thoroughly cowed by the retribution which had overtaken him.

Mr. Russell and Alice stood somewhat apart from the others, her hand in his, eager words passing between them.

Suddenly she started. She had heard Dick pronounce plaintively the name of "Phil."

"Oh! how neglectful of us all!" she cried. "Can it be possible he is drowned? Oh, gentlemen, do try and save him! It may not be too late! He may be swimming!"

"I rather guess not," said Fagan, with a look of brutal triumph. "He's got a bullet through his ribs. He's paid for his fun, anyhow."

"I am afraid the villain is right," Mr. Russell gravely remarked. "I saw the shot and am sure he was struck."

"But he may not have been killed!" exclaimed Dick, eagerly. "Might as well try to kill a cat as Phil Hardy. Aint water enough here to drown him?"

"I hope so, fervently," spoke the feeling heart of Alice, as she looked with frightened eyes over the vessel's side.

Where are you, Phil? Come, lad, turn up. Don't let them say they made you step out!" cried Dick, in a tone of earnest appeal.

"Ahoy!" shouted old Bowline, excited by Dick's call. "That's the talk! Ahoy, lad! Tumble up for rations! Don't let Davy Jones rope you in."

"You can hail till you're blue," was Fagan's brutal rejoinder. "That wharf rat has gnawed his last hole."

"Bet a flip you're a-lying," came a familiar voice from the direction of the vessel's bow. "Maybe you souse it's in you to lay out Phil Hardy like I'd lay out a crab; but I don't souse it is. If Tim Fagan don't kick the bucket from an overdose of rope afore I peg out from lead or salt water, why jist call me a liar, that's all."

Ere this speech was half through Dick had given vent to a regular Indian yell, and was darting like an arrow for the bowsprit of the vessel.

All eyes were turned in the same direction, and there, on the very extremity of the spar, was perched the diminutive form of Phil Hardy, streaming with water, but as bold and saucy-looking as ever boy's face was capable of.

"It's me—Phil!" he shouted. "Good to take the

starch out of a dozen sich outrageous gangs as this. You kin take hold of me, Dick. I'm all here. And you're a reg'lar first-class boss!"

Old Bowline caught the two boys in his arms as they came in from the bowsprit, giving them a hug which seemed as if it would have crushed the ribs of an elephant.

"Hope I aint hurting you," he apologetically remarked. "Maybe you've got a bullet-hole through you, and it mayn't be healthy to be squeezed."

"Don't b'lieve it would be healthy to be hugged by you, if a feller had white-oak muscles, and nary a knothole in them," answered Phil, rubbing his sides dubiously. "Wouldn't like to be the gal you was in love with."

"But are you hurt, Phil?" asked Mr. Russell, pressing anxiously forward. "I was sure his bullet struck you."

"It plowed a little openin' in my left arm," said Phil, carelessly. "Nothin' to hurt, though. Only a musketo bite."

Alice gave a cry of alarm at this information, and hastily pulled up the lad's loose sleeve. The sleeve was full of blood, from a wound which seemed to run from the wrist to the elbow.

"Poor fellow, he is badly hurt!" she pathetically remarked.

Taking her handkerchief she wrapped it dexterously round the boy's arm.

"Fly for a doctor, Mr. Russell!" she cried. "He is badly wounded! See how he has bled!"

"I won't have no doctor but you," said Phil, sturdily. "Se 'tain't no use botherin' them. This hankercher will be all the medicine I'll want."

"It is only a scratch," remarked old Bowline, in a reassuring tone.

"That's all. It's only cut the skin, and plowed an inch or two under," Phil coolly declared. "Guess that aint worth goin' on about."

The tugboat had proceeded with her operations through all this startling episode, and had hauled the Strongbow up to her new wharf, against which she quietly lay.

The parties on the wharf, full of excitement at the scene they had witnessed, swarmed on board, asking a thousand questions, and managing remarkably well at getting in everybody's way.

"If there ever was a parcel of folks without the common sense that human critters ought to be born with, it's a set of land-lubbers," growled old Bowline. "Ahoy there! Clear ship! and give the lads a chance to rope her in."

"Guess old salt water will have his hands full to git rid of that crowd," said Dick. "But stir up, Phil. You haven't told us yit how you got clear from drownin'."

"Drown me?" replied Phil, with a sniff of contempt. "Don't souse I could be drowned in a duck-pond like the East river? I aint one of them sort."

"But you sunk under the water and failed to come up again," said Mr. Russell. "I am curious to know how you escaped."

An eager throng had gathered around to hear Phil's answer, for there were more than Mr. Russell curious about the matter.

"Didn't souse I was goin' to pop my head up in the same place to draw another bullet, did you?" asked Phil, somewhat contemptuously. "I aint that kind of chap. Got two bullet-marks now, one in the arm and tother in the head. That's enough glory fur one day."

The pitying eyes of Alice were turned to the boy's head, where a red line showed itself through the matted hair. His plunge overboard had washed it clean, but the blood was slowly oozing again.

"He must have a doctor! At once!" cried Alice, anxiously. "He may be dangerously wounded!"

"What? that?" asked Phil carelessly. "That's only a pin scratch. That's arter I got you up into the second story of the ship. He chased me and fired pistols at me, jist as if I was a rat. I flung him though, neat enough."

"But, you have not told us yet how you escaped from your fall," remarked one of the curious bystanders.

"Oh! that was easy enough," Phil carelessly rejoined. "I weren't goin' to pop up to popped off. He mought take better aim next time. So I jist took a little dive and a swim under water, and come up tother side the ship. Then I hauled myself along, hand over hand, till I come to the bow, where thar was a handy rope hangin'. I went up that rope jist like a cat shins up a tree, and 'stablished myself on the bowsprit. And here's me now, sound in wind and pocket."

Phil walked loftily away through the throng, as if contemning them too much to be made the target of any more of their questions.

The officers meanwhile had been busy in removing their prisoners to the police tug. The dead body of Hendricks was taken on board, along with the living villains. One of the officers was left in temporary charge of the ship, and particularly of the effects of the captain and mate.

Mr. Russell had declined going with them in their boat. He did not quite like the notoriety of such a passage. He and Alice, accompanied by the two boys, sought the nearest ferry.

On the way, however, Alice insisted on stopping at a physician's, and having Phil's wounds examined. They were pronounced in no respect dangerous, though he would have a painful arm for a few weeks.

"Guess I kin stand it," announced Phil, as he submitted to the bandaging. "I'm goin' to keep this hankercher, Miss Alice. I aint got notin' of yourn, you know. And I want somethin' to remember you by."

"What? an old blood-stained handkerchief? No indeed! I shall give you something of more value."

"Don't believe you will," replied Phil sturdily. "This belonged to you, and it's got a history. Them's two things. Don't want no bought goods."

Alice yielded to the sentiment of the lad and said no more.

After some consideration it was decided that she should stay temporarily with Mrs. Hardy, while Mr. Russell hunted up her aunt, and apprised her of these occurrences.

The old lady was proud and glad enough when she saw her former visitor return, and Susy danced around her with the lightness and joy of a fairy.

"To think of your being so kind as to come here!" Mrs. Hardy exclaimed, with tears in her eyes. "Why, of course I am too glad to have her," she continued to Mr. Russell. "And thank you kindly for bringing her."

"And do tell us the whole story," cried Susy, dancing still in her excitement. "We only know a little bit of it."

"The rest aint worth telling," muttered Phil, sourly.

"Don't you swallow that, Susy," responded Dick. "Phil's just the boss boy out, that's all."

"I will tell you what I know of it," said Alice. She proceeded to do so, Phil nervously crossing and uncrossing his legs and twisting his arms, and looking as sour in the face as if he had been given a disagreeable dose of medicine.

He could not help striking in, however, with an occasional emendation of her account, and a piecing-out of the parts of which she was not cognizant, though sternly deprecating that he had done anything more than any boy might do "if he'd been fixed just like him."

"And been built like you," said Dick. Yet Phil could not help himself from being lionized. His grandmother was enthusiastic in her delight, while Susy seemed wild with joy in her boy, as she called him.

"And you, too, Dick," she cried. "I declare if his face isn't as clean as a new penny. I'll have to kiss you too, if only to thank you for having such a well washed face. And—where's Mr. Russell and Miss Alice?"

"Oh! they are just having a private talk in the next room," said Mrs. Hardy, with a meaning look. "Going over some matters of business, I suppose."

CHAPTER XXV.

ALICE HOMER'S STORY.

THERE was a happy party gathered in Mrs. Hardy's combination-apartment, serving, as it did, the triple purpose of kitchen, dining-room, and parlor. It was the day succeeding that which had been so full of exciting events, and all our friends were there, Phil and his crony, Dick; Mrs. Hardy and Susy; Alice and Mr. Russell.

The latter had promised an explanation of the cause of the murderous persecution of Alice by the gang of villains who had been apprehended, and there was much curiosity in the minds of the others to hear his story.

He had just come in, and stood leaning gracefully on the back of a chair, as he addressed Alice.

"I have just seen Mrs. Corson," he said. "She is anxious to have you come at once. She was perfectly horrified to hear of what had happened."

"I don't wonder," broke in Mrs. Hardy, energetically. "It is enough to make any reasonable creature's hair stand on end.—But do sit down, Mr. Russell. And let me have your hat."

She took it from him with scant ceremony, and with kindly vigor hustled him into a chair beside Alice.

"Never like to see no one standing when it's just as easy to sit," she explained.

"Just as live stand, any time," said Phil, in an aside. "If it wasn't on my head."

"Hush!" warned Susy. "You've got no business to be contradicting your grandmother. She ought to know better than you."

"Maybe she ought," persisted Phil, "but she don't always."

"I suppose you are all willing to hear what I believe I offered to tell you to-day," remarked Mr. Russell.

"Yes; willin' in the way a feller's willin' to eat his supper after he's got cheated out of his dinner," broke in Phil.

"You keep quiet," admonished Dick, in an undertone. "Let the old folks do the talking."

"You dunno how it is," answered Phil, in the same tone. "My tongue gits loose sometimes, and it's the hardest thing a-goin' to nail it down. Got to let off the exhaust steam, you know."

"As soon as my friend Phil gets through with his private conversation I am ready to proceed," remarked Mr. Russell, with a comical look.

"Oh! I'm done. Dried up. Shut tighter than a clam," cried Phil. "Don't b'lieve you could pull another word out of me with a fish hook."

There was a slight laugh, as much at his tone as his words, and Mr. Russell proceeded:

"Miss Homer is an American by birth," he said, "though she has spent all the latter portion of her life in England. Her parents removed there when she was—how old, Alice?"

"You should know," she replied. "You and I then were about as close friends as Phil and Susy are now."

Susy blushed, and moved her chair back a slight space from Phil's.

"Well, about twelve, or some such venerable age," continued Mr. Russell. "There was some unpleasant feeling in the family at the time, which was the principal cause of this emigration. Your uncle Allen was always a cross-grained, eccentric fellow, Alice. The only way to get along with him was to quarrel occasionally."

"I only remember him as a kind old gentleman," replied Alice. "And I know that my father blamed Andrew Cunningham as being the cause of the quarrel which separated us."

"I think there can be no question of that," responded Mr. Russell. "He has always been a hidden serpent, and he is perfectly ruthless to any person or thing which stands in his way."

"Anyhow he's got his rations now," remarked Phil, in an undertone.

"He bore the same relationship to Allen Mercer as did Miss Homer," continued Mr. Russell. "The old man was rich, and was getting feeble. It was a shrewd trick to drive away his proud competitor, for Mr. Homer was quick and haughty in temper, and would have lost an inheritance any time rather than submit to insult. After his departure Cunningham tried, and succeeded somewhat, in getting the old man under his own influence."

"What a villain he must have been!" murmured Mrs. Hardy.

"He was always that," replied Mr. Russell. "One of your smooth, wily villains, who usually manage to hide their hands in their rascally schemes. I distrusted him, boy as I was, and blamed him for driving Alice across the ocean, and forcing us to the poor comfort of letter-writing."

"Aint you never seen her since?" asked Phil. "You knowed one another at sight, aboard the Strongbow."

"Oh! he has been across the ocean to see me," explained Alice, with a slight blush. "I lost both my parents within a year or two past. Mr. Russell came over, as soon as he heard of my bereavement. He was ever so kind to me. I shall never forget his tenderness."

There was a sad tone in her voice, but her eyes were fixed on the face of her lover with a look of unbounded faith and trustfulness.

"Thought it was queer how you kept up your sweetness across so much salt water," muttered Phil.

"Hush, Phil!" Susy admonishingly whispered. "I am quite ashamed of you."

"Bet if it was you, Susy, I'd cross the duck-pond, too," Phil energetically returned.

"I wish you young fry would quit chattering there in the corner," exclaimed Mrs. Hardy. "Mr. Russell can't go on for you."

"Oh! I guess so," replied that gentleman. "Let them talk if they wish. To proceed with my story:—about six months ago Mr. Mercer died. When his will came to be read it proved that the eccentric old man had been less under the influence of Andrew Cunningham than that individual imagined. For it was found that he had left the bulk of his property to his orphan niece, Alice Homer. The fact of her having lost her parents probably had something to do with softening the heart of her uncle toward her."

"How came Cunningham then to have any claim?" asked Mrs. Hardy.

"Through a codicil to the will. Alice grieved much over the loss of her parents, and was very ill for a long time. Fearing she might die and leave no heir to his estate, Mr. Mercer had appended this codicil, leaving her inheritance to Andrew Cunningham in the event of her dying unmarried. That is the whole secret of the villain's murderous schemes."

"Taint too late for him yet then," remarked Phil, with a meaning glance.

"It shall be soon—that is if Alice consents," said Mr. Russell, with a look of the deepest love in his eyes.

"I suppose I must do something for personal safety," she blushing replied.

"Hurrah! for our side!" cried Phil, flinging up his cap enthusiastically. "Spose you're goin' to give us all an invite to the weddin'. I'm goin' anyhow, invite or no."

"Hold your tongue, Phil," replied Mrs. Hardy severely. "I never saw anybody so ridiculous."

"Fraid I was born a little ridic'ulous," returned Phil. "It seems a kind of nat'ral disposition."

"Now wunt you hush?" asked Susy, placing her hand very sternly over his mouth. "You will be making Mr. Russell and Miss Alice think you are silly."

"Let him have his joke," said Mr. Russell, laughing. "We are too old lovers to mind it. And if I am any judge of signs our turn will come yet."

"Mought come now and not miss it much," ventured Dick, with a sly glance at Phil and Susy.

"Oh!" said she, pettishly, removing her hand from Phil's shoulder. "I wish you would let Mr. Russell finish his story. You don't give him a chance to speak."

She seated herself in the corner, as far away from her young sweetheart as possible.

"I think Alice will have to tell the rest," added Mr. Russell, with an amused look at the young folks. "I am as anxious as yourselves to know her adventures."

"I was expecting, you know, to come to America shortly," she responded. "In fact, I was waiting principally for instructions from you. At this juncture I received a note stating that you had found it advisable to cross to Liverpool, and had just arrived, but were too sick to leave the ship, and requesting me to come to you. Of course you had not written it, but in my haste and excitement I failed to notice that it was only a clever imitation of your handwriting. The bearer had a carriage at the door, and I hastened to accompany him to the ship."

"A most villainous plot!" broke in Mr. Russell, hotly.

"It proved so, indeed," continued Alice. "In the cabin I found only the captain and mate. Before I even suspected anything wrong; they had me securely bound. They next gagged me so that I could

not utter a sound, and locked me in one of the state-rooms."

"Didn't none of the sailors know you were there?" asked Phil.

"No. It was dusk when I was taken on board, and I observed none of them on deck. They may have been removed purposely."

"No doubt of it. Their scheme was well laid," exclaimed Mr. Russell.

"My next few hours were full of the deepest mental and physical agony," continued Alice. "When my bonds were removed we were far out of sight of land. I need not dilate on the long and dismal voyage, which was one unceasing agony to me. Yet I suffered nothing at the hands of the villains beyond the pain of confinement, and fierce threats of personal injury if I should make any effort to attract attention. Otherwise I was well cared for."

"I imagine that fear of discovery by the sailors prevented them from attempting to murder you on the open sea," remarked Mr. Russell.

"Very probably. My great source of suffering was distrust and doubt as to their object. I early suspected Mr. Cunningham's connection with my abduction, but they would admit nothing.—This, I believe, is all I have to tell. I remember falling into a deep lethargy one evening after eating. My life was a blank from that moment until I found myself on the point of being hurled into the water.—What has happened since I think I can best leave my brave you g friend to relate."

She turned to Phil with a winning smile that went straight to his heart.

Our hero, nothing loth, proceeded to describe his part in the affair, dilating considerably as he related the events with which the reader is already conversant.

Dick helped his modesty over some difficult passages, and he was looked on as quite a lion by the time he had finished.

"I declare I never knewed the half of what was going on," cried his grandmother, affectionately embracing him.

"I did, then," said Susy. "I knew my Phil was the bravest fellow alive." And she too had her embrace.

"What can we ever do to reward you?" asked Alice and Mr. Russell together.

"Guv me an invite to that weddin'. I guess that will answer," replied Phil. "And if ever me and Susy gits spliced, we wont forgit to return the compliment."

CHAPTER XXVI.

FINALE.

PHIL got his invitation to the wedding. Nor did he have long to wait. Mr. Russell and Alice had been declared lovers too long to desire much delay in the ceremony; and her position as a visitor in the family of a relative who was almost a stranger was not one which she wished to continue.

Of course there was that inevitable "getting ready," that instinctive desire to shine for once in a woman's life, that always sets in operation a busy dressmaking manufactory.

And Alice literally had nothing to wear. All her effects were in Liverpool, where her friends had been in a state of terror at her unaccountable disappearance, and had vainly made every effort to discover her.

It was necessary to write and explain what had happened, and to have her clothes and other possessions sent over by steamer.

But the days of waiting which stretch out so interminably to lovers, and slip so glibly by to the rest of mankind, came duly to an end.

There were other preparations, besides those of the bride. Mr. Russell had not forgotten his promise of an invitation to his young friends, and wished to make them presentable.

Phil blossomed to a real dandy in his "spick and span" new suit of navy blue. Dick was treated to a series of Turkish baths, and for once in his life felt as clean as a new whistle, and dressed like a gentleman. Even Mrs. Hardy found herself the owner of a new black silk dress. And as for Susy, she was like an animated rainbow, in her brand-new silken attire.

"If we aint jist scrumptious there's no use talkin'," declared Phil, twisting himself so as to see the whole of his figure in a diminutive mirror, and turning the others round for observation, as if they had been dry-goods dummies. "Bet folks will screw their eyes to look at us when we march into church, and will be a wonderin' who that distinguished party of individuals is."

"Don't be getting vain, Phil," replied Mrs. Hardy, admonishingly. "There wont a soul look at us, among all the fine folks.—And I heartily wish they wont."

"Them that lives the longest will see the most," was Phil's sententious response.

Phil's opinion proved to be the correct one. Many an eye observed them with curious interest as they entered the church at a rather late hour, Susy's bright face being the main attraction. But Phil's self-possessed and handsome countenance, and the shy embarrassment of Dick, were not without their admirers.

The wedding was very simply conducted, a little to the disappointment of our young friends, who had expected to see a sort of Arabian Nights' Entertainment.

Yet everybody remarked that the bride was perfectly beautiful in her floating, fleecy white, and with the look of perfect happiness and trustfulness on her fresh young face. And as for Mr. Russell, there was no denying that he was a handsome man, and that he was deeply in love with the bride!

needed but a glance into his warm and earnest face to decide.

"If they aint goin' to be happy folks it'll be 'cause the sun will quit shinin'," remarked Phil. "It's just as pretty as a pictur. And only look at their eyes! I don't b'lieve there's nothin' in the world they hold 'cept one another."

"I hope they will let me shake hands with them," said Susy, timidly, as the happy couple came down the aisle, amid the congratulations of numerous friends.

Susy's wish was gratified, for they stopped and shook hands warmly with the whole party, and gave them the most pressing invitation to attend the wedding reception at Mr. Russell's home, where they intended to reside after a short wedding journey.

Mr. Russell and his bride were back, and the reception, with its glow of light, its glitter of dress, its eager buzz of congratulation, and its destruction of cake and refreshments, was well over before their attention was required at the trial of the conspirators, who still remained in prison.

Efforts had been made to bail Mr. Cunningham out, but the charges against him were so serious and so well substantiated that no one could be found willing to risk a large sum of money on his probity.

The Strongbow had long since sailed, with a new captain and mate, before her late captain was put in the prisoner's dock charged with the high crimes and misdemeanors of which he had been guilty.

The three prisoners were given separate trials, as the character of the evidence against them somewhat differed. But the proofs of their villainy were so evident that the court felt almost like dealing with them as if they had committed the murders which they had so desperately attempted.

There was the strongest interest manifested in the exciting stories told by the boys, and confirmed in their important details by the evidence of Alice, and by the intercepted check and letters.

There were minor witnesses whose testimony tended to corroborate that of the principal ones, and the result of the trials was quick convictions by the jury, and severe sentences by the judge.

The two principal villains, Mr. Cunningham and Captain Monroe, were sentenced each to ten years' imprisonment, while Tim Fagan, as a less guilty accessory, received a sentence of six years' confinement.

There was something saddening in their demeanor as they were removed from court. Captain Monroe was so overcome with the retribution which had befallen him that he staggered, while his haggard face looked pitifully round on the assembled multitude. Fagan, on the contrary, was bold and defiant. He even laughed as he met the eyes of a friend. But his laugh had in it that nervous strain which showed that all this bravado was assumed to mask a trembling heart.

Cunningham was the only one of the three who had the merit of courage to sustain his crime. His step was steady and assured, his face resolute in its expression, yet there was a sadness in his eyes which showed that the soul of the villain was clothed in despair.

And so the veil falls which shuts them out from our little world, and from the world of men for years and years, while they are suffering unseen the penalty which their crimes have brought upon them.

As for our other characters, there was no further obstacle in the way of Alice's falling into her inheritance. Mr. Russell was already in comfortable circumstances, and the two fortunes in one made them wealthy. Not that they cared for the ostentation of wealth. But they both loved beautiful things, and their house on Madison avenue became to our young friends like a palace of fairy-land, in its profusion of pictures, statuettes, and other artistic surroundings.

For Mr. and Mrs. Russell never forgot the debt which they owed to the three young folks to whose helping hand their present happiness was due. Their house was always free to Phil, Dick and Susy, and many were the happy days of boy and girl life spent with these considerate friends.

Nor was more substantial recognition of the invaluable services of our youthful heroes wanting. Mrs. Hardy was enabled to move from her straightened quarters into apartments which gladdened her soul, both from their amplitude and their comfortable furniture. She blossomed, in this sun of prosperity, into the happiest of housekeepers.

Susy's parents, too, felt the same sun shine on them, and were enabled to remove to the more stylish neighborhood now inhabited by their old neighbor. This was thoroughly to the satisfaction of Phil and Susy, whose boy and girl affection still kept up.

But, Phil is not now the diminutive and vagabondish wharf-rat which we first knew him. He has grown into a tall, shapely youth, always neatly dressed, and his old slipshod speech corrected by the influence of several years of school life. In fact, his native quickness of apprehension is making him quite a scholar.

As for Dick, he is Dirty Dick no more. Having once found out the benefits of the Turkish bath he could never be induced to go back to his old slovenly ways. The influence of his new wedding-suit helped to produce this effect. He had never possessed good clothes before, and became so in love with his improved appearance as to effect a radical change in his whole disposition.

About this time he lost his only remaining parent, and was left a homeless orphan. Mr. Russell at once took him in charge, finding him a home with the Hardys, and sending him to school in company with Phil.

Their benefactor is just now a little troubled in mind about what business he had better put them at, so as to make them useful and creditable members of society.

"I don't care much," says Phil, in something of his old manner, "what he does with me. I have a notion, though, that I'd like to learn to be a sea-captain, or some nice business of that sort."

"I'd ten times sooner be a farmer," puts in Dick. "I don't like salt water now."

"Wouldn't one of you like to be a Governor and the other a Commodore?" asks Susy, demurely. "I wouldn't climb for anything but the top of the hill, if I were you."

"But you aint us, which I am very glad of," replies Phil, looking affectionately at the tall, bright-faced, beautiful girl, before him. "I don't think I would like you much if you were anything like Dick or me, for I can't see that there is much worth loving about us."

"That is where your eyesight fails you, Phil," responds Susy, laughing, and pressing his hand affectionately. "I wouldn't want everybody to know how good a fellow you are."

"They can know as much as they please that you are the nicest girl under the sun," replies Phil, enthusiastically. "I bet there's none of them who can take my little sweetheart from me, try as much as they please."

Susy's reply was a look as if she fully indorsed Phil's views in this respect, and loved him too dearly to ever turn from him.

And so we must leave them, still in the boy and girl phase of life, but growing into such ripe promise of manhood and womanhood, that their friends, the Russells, are delighted with their proteges, while Mrs. Hardy is so happy that the day is hardly long enough to contain her measure of perfect satisfaction.

THE END.

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